GUY AND PAULINE

BY

COMPTON MACKENZIE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE PASSIONATE ELOPEMENT
CARNIVAL
SINISTER STREET: VOLUME ONE
SINISTER STREET: VOLUME TWO
KENSINGTON RHYMES

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GUY AND PAULINE

By *COMPTON MACKENZIE*

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TO

GENERAL
SIR IAN HAMILTON
G.C.B., D.S.O.

AND THE GENERAL STAFF OF THE
MEDITERRANEAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

CONTENTS

AUTUMN

September

THE slow train puffed away into the unadventurous country; and the bees buzzing round the wine-dark dahlias along the platform were once again audible. The last farewell that Guy Hazlewood flung over his shoulder to a parting friend was more casual than it would have been, had he not at the same moment been turning to ask the solitary porter how many cases of books awaited his disposition. They were very heavy, it seemed; and the porter, as he led the way toward the small and obscure purgatory through which every package for Shipcot must pass, declared he was surprized to hear these cases contained merely books. He would not go so far as to suggest that hitherto he had never faced the existence of books in such quantity, for the admission might have impugned official omniscience; yet there was in his attitude just as much incredulity mingled with disdain of useless learning as would preserve his dignity without jeopardizing the financial compliment his services were owed.

"Ah, well," he decided, as if he were trying to smooth over Guy's embarrassment at the sight of these large packing-cases in the parcel-office. "You'll want something as'll keep you busy this winter—for you'll be the gentleman who've come to live down Wychford way?"

Guy nodded.

"And Wychford is mortal dead in winter. Time walks very lame there, as they say. And all these books, I suppose, were better to come along of the bus to-night?"

Guy looked doubtful. It was seeming a pity to waste this afternoon without unpacking a single case.

"The trap . . ." he began.

But the porter interrupted him firmly: he did not think Mr. Godbold would relish the notion of one of these packing-cases in his new trap.

"I could give you a hand . . ." Guy began again.

The porter stiffened himself against the slight upon his strength.

"It's not the heffort," he asserted. "Heffort is what I must look for every day of my life. It's Mr. Godbold's trap."

The discussion was given another turn by the entrance of Mr. Godbold himself. He was not at all concerned for his trap, and indeed by an asseverated indifference to its welfare he conveyed the impression that, new though it were, it was so much firewood, if the gentleman wanted firewood. No, the trap did not matter, but what about Mr. Hazlewood's knees?

"Ah, there you are," said the porter, and he and Mr. Godbold both stood dumb in the presence of the finally insuperable.

"I suppose it must be the bus," said Guy. On such a sleepy afternoon he could argue no longer. The books must be unpacked to-morrow; and the word lulled like an opiate the faint irritation of his disappointment. The porter's reiterated altruism was rewarded with a fee so absurdly in excess of anything he had done, that he began to speak of a possibility if after all the smallest case might not be squeezed . . . but Mr. Godbold flicked the pony, and the trap rattled up the station road at a pace quite out of accord with the warmth of the afternoon. Presently he turned to his fare:

"Mrs. Godbold said to me only this morning, she said, 'You ought to have had a luggage-flap behind and that I shall always say.' And she was right. Women is often right, what's more," the husband postulated.

Guy nodded absently: he was thinking about the books.

"Very often right," Mr. Godbold murmured.

Still Guy paid no attention.

"Very often," he repeated, but as Guy would neither contradict nor agree with him, Mr. Godbold relapsed into meditation upon the justice of his observation. The pony had settled down to his wonted pace and jogged on through the golden haze of fine September weather. Soon the village of Shipcot was left behind, and before them lay the long road winding upward over the wold to Wychford. Guy thought of the friend who had left him that afternoon and wished that Michael Fane were still with him to enjoy this illimitable sweep of country. He had been the very person to share in the excitement of arranging a new house. Guy could not remember that he had ever made a suggestion for which he had not been asked; nor could he call to mind a single occasion when his appreciation had failed. And now to-night, when for the first time he was going to sleep in his own house, his friend was gone. There had been no hint of departure during the six weeks of preparation they had spent together at the Stag Inn, and it was really perverse of Michael to rush back to London now. Guy jumped down from the trap, which was climbing the hill very slowly, and stretched his long legs. He was rather bored by his loneliness, but as soon as he had stated so much to himself, he was shocked at the disloyalty to his ambition. After all, he reassured himself, he was not going back to a dull inn-parlour: to-night he was going to sleep in an hermitage for the right to enjoy the seclusion of which he had been compelled to fight very hard. It was weak to imagine he was lonely already, and to fortify himself against this mood, he pulled out of his pocket his father's last letter and read it again while he walked up the hill behind the trap.

FOX HALL, GALTON, HANTS.
September 10.

Dear Guy,

I agree with some of what you say, but I disagree with a good deal more, and I am entirely opposed to your method of procedure, which is to put it very mildly rather casual. Your degree was not so good as it ought to have been, but I did not reproach you, because in the Consular Service you had chosen a career which did not call specially for a first. At the same time you could, if you had worked, have got a first quite easily. Your six months with the Macedonian Relief people seems to have knocked all your consular ambitions on the head rather too easily, I confess, to make me feel very happy about your future. And now without consulting me you take a house in the country for the purpose of writing poetry! You imply in answer to my remonstrances that I am unable to appreciate the 'necessity' for your step. That may be, but I cannot help asking where you would be now if I at your age, instead of helping my father with his school, had gone off to Oxfordshire to write poetry. Perhaps I had ambitions to make a name for myself with the pen. If I had, I quenched them in order to devote myself to what I considered my duty. I do not reproach you for refusing to carry on the school at Fox Hall. Your dear mother's last request was that I should not urge you to be a schoolmaster, unless you were drawn to the vocation. Her wishes I have respected, and I repeat that I am not hurt at your refusal. At the same time I cannot encourage what can only be described as this whim of yours to bury yourself in a remote village where, having saddled yourself with the responsibilities of a house, you announce your intention of living by poetry! I am the last person to underestimate the value of poetry, but as a livelihood it seems to me as little to be relied upon as the weather. However, you are of age. You have £150 a year of your own. You are with the exercise of the strictest economy independent. And this brings me to the

point of your last letter in which you ask me to supplement your own income with an allowance of £150 a year from me. This inclination to depend upon your father is not what I conceive to be the artist's spirit of independence. This over-drawing upon your achievement fills me with dismay for the future. However, since I do not wish you to begin hampered by debt and as you assure me that you have spent all your own money on this idiotic house, I will give you £150, to be paid in quarterly instalments of £37 10s. as from the 21st of this month for one year. Furthermore, at the end of next year if you find that poetry is less profitable than even you expect, I will offer you a place at Fox Hall, thereby securing for you the certainty of a life moderately free from financial worries. After all, even a schoolmaster has some spare time, and I dare-say our greatest poets did much of their best work in their spare *time. The idea of writing poetry all day and every day appeals to me as enervating and ostentatious.*

Your affectionate father,

John Hazlewood.

Guy stood still when he had finished the letter, and execrated mutely the damnable dependence that compelled him to accept gratefully and humbly this gift of £150. Yet with no money of his own coming in till December, with actually a housekeeper on her way from Cardiff and his house already furnished, he must accept the offer. In a year's time he would have proved the reasonableness of his request; and he began to compose a scene between them, in which his father would almost on bended knees beg him to accept an allowance of £300 a year in consideration of the magnificent proof he had afforded to the world of being in the direct line of English poets.

"And I mustn't forget to send him a sonnet on his birthday," said Guy to himself.

This notion restored his dignity, and he hurried on to overtake the trap which was waiting on the brow of the hill.

"You were saying something about women being right," he reminded Mr. Godbold, as he sat down again beside him. "Has it ever struck you that fathers are nearly always wrong?"

"That wouldn't do for me at all," said Mr. Godbold, shaking his head. "You see I'm the father of nine, and if I wasn't always right, sir, I shouldn't be no better than a bull in a china-shop where I live. I've *got* to be right, Mr. Hazlewood."

"I suppose that's what the Pope felt," Guy murmured.

"Now do you reckon this here Pope they speak of really exists in a manner of speaking?" Mr. Godbold asked, as the trap bowled along the level stretch of upland road. "You know there's some of these narrow-minded mortals at Wychford as will have it that Mr. Grey, our parson, is in with the Pope, and I said to one or two of them the other night while we was arguing in the post-office, I said, 'Have any of you wise men of Gotham ever seen this Pope as you're so knowing about?'"

"And had they?" asked Guy encouragingly.

"Not one of them," said Mr. Godbold. "And I thought to myself as I was walking up home, I thought now what if there wasn't no such thing as a Pope any more than there's women with fish-tails and all this rubbish you read of in books. If you ask my opinion of books, Mr. Hazlewood, I tell you that I think books is as bad for some people as wireworms is for carnations. They seem to regular eat into them."

Guy laughed. Misgivings about the wisdom of his choice vanished, and he was being conscious of a very intimate pleasure in thus driving back to Wychford from

the station. The country tossed for miles to right and left in great stretches of pasturage, and when Mr. Godbold pulled up for a moment to look at a trace, the air brilliantly dusted with autumnal gold seemed to endow him with the richness of its silence: along the sparse hedgerow chicory flowers burned with the pale intense blue of the September sky above, and Guy felt like them worshipful of the cloudless scene. The road ran along the upland for half-a-mile before it dipped suddenly down into the valley of the Greenrush from which the spire of Wychford church came delicately up into the air, like a coil of smoke ascending from the opalescent corona that hung over the small town clustered against the farther hillside. Down in that valley close to the church was Plashers Mead; and Guy watched eagerly for the first sight of his long low house. Already the sparkle of the more distant curves of the Greenrush was visible; but Plashers Mead was still hidden by the slope of the bank. Presently this broke away to a ragged hedge, and the house displayed itself as much an integral part of the landscape as an outcrop of stone.

"Tasty little place," commented Mr. Godbold, while the trap jolted cautiously down the last twist of the hilly road. "But I reckon old Burrows was glad to let it. You're young though, and I daresay you won't mind being flooded out in winter. Two years ago Burrows's son's wife's nephew was floating paper boats in the front hall. But you're young, and I daresay you'll enjoy it."

The pony swept round the corner and pulled up with a jerk at the wooden gateway in the grey wall overhung by lime-trees that concealed from the high road the moist fields and garden of Plashers Mead.

"I'm sleeping here to-night, you know, for the first time," said Guy. He had tried all the way back not to make this announcement, but the sight of his own gateway destroyed his reserve.

"Well, you'll have a fine night, that's one good job," Mr. Godbold predicted.

"And the moon only just past the full," said Guy.

"That's right," Mr. Godbold agreed; and the tenant passed through the gateway into the garden where every path had its own melody of running water. He examined with proprietary solicitude the espaliers of apple-trees and admired for the twentieth time the pledge they offered by their fantastic forms of his garden's antiquity. He pinched several pippins that seemed ripe, but they were still hard; and he could find nothing over which to exert his lordship, until he saw by the edge of the path a piece of groundsel. Having solemnly exterminated the weed, Guy felt that the garden must henceforth recognize him as master, and he walked on through a mass of dropsical cabbages and early kale until he came face to face with the house, the sudden view of which like this never failed to give him a peculiar pleasure. The tangled garden, long and narrow, was bounded on the right, as one entered, by the Greenrush, over which hung a thicket of yews that completely shut out the first straggling houses of Wychford. On the left the massed espaliers ended abruptly in a large water-meadow reaching to the foot of the hill along which the high road climbed in a slow diagonal. By the corner of the house the garden had narrowed to the apex of a thin triangle, so that the windows looked out over the water-meadow and, beyond, up the wide valley of the Greenrush to where the mighty western sky rested on rounded hills. At this apex the Greenrush flung a tributary stream to wash the back of the house and one side of the orchard, whence it wound in extravagant curves towards the easterly valley. The main branch, dammed up to form a deep and sluggish mill-stream, flowed straight on, dividing Guy's domain from the churchyard. At the end of the orchard on this side was a lock-gate through which a certain

amount of water continuously escaped from the mill-stream, enough indeed to make the orchard an island, as it trickled in diamonded shallows to reinforce the idle tributary. Somewhere in the farther depths of the eastern valley all vagrant waters were united, and somewhere still more remote they came to a confluence with their father the Thames.

Guy sat upon the parapet of the well under the shade of a sycamore tree and regarded with admiration and satisfaction the exterior of his house. He looked at the semi-circular porch of stone over the front-door and venerated the supporting cherubs who with puffed-out cheeks had blown defiance at wind and rain since the days of Elizabeth. He counted the nine windows, five above and four below, populating with the shapes of many friends the rooms they lightened. He looked at the steep roof of grey stone-tiles rich with the warm golden green of mossy patterns. He looked at the four pear-trees against the walls of the house barren now for many years. He looked at himself in silhouette against the silver sky of the well-water; and then he went indoors.

The big stone-paved hall was very cool, and the sound of the stream at the back came babbling through lattices open to the light of a green world. Guy could not make up his mind whether the inside of the house smelt very dry or very damp, for there clung about it that odour peculiar to rustic age, which may be found equally in dry old barns and in damp potting-sheds. He wished he could furnish the hall worthily. At present it contained only a high-back chair, an alleged contemporary of Cromwell, which was doddering beside the hooded fireplace; a warming-pan; and an oak-chest which remained a chest only so long as nobody either sat upon it or lifted the lid. There was also a grandfather-clock which had suffered an abrupt resurrection of four minutes' duration when it was recently

lifted out of the furniture-van, but had now relapsed into the silence of years. Leading out of the hall was a small empty room which had been dedicated to the possession of his friend Michael Fane : together they had planned to paper it with gold and paint the ceiling black. Michael, however, had still another year at Oxford, and the room with an obelisk of lining-paper standing upright on the bare floor was now a little desolate. On the other side of the hall was the dining-room which Guy, by taxing his resources, had managed to furnish very successfully. It was a square room painted emerald-green above the white wainscot. Two inset cupboards were filled with glass and china : there were four Chippendale chairs and an oval Sheraton table, curtains of purple silk, some old English watercolours and two candlesticks of Sheffield plate. Beyond the dining-room was the kitchen, the corridor to which was endowed with a swinging baize-door considered by the landlord to be the finest feature of the house. The problem of equipping the kitchen had seemed insoluble until Guy heard of a sale in the neighbourhood. He had bicycled over to this and bought the contents of the large kitchen at auction. The result was that the dresser encroached upon the table, that the table had one leg in the fender and that a row of graduated dish-covers, the largest of which would have sheltered two turkeys, occupied whatever space was left. All that remained of Guy's own money had been invested in his kitchen, and he accounted for the large size of everything by the fact of the auction's having been held in the open air, where everything had looked so much smaller. Now, as he contemplated dubiously the result, he wondered what Miss Peasey would say to it. She and the books would arrive together at half-past nine to-night. He hoped his unknown housekeeper would not be irritated by these dish-covers, and as a precautionary measure he unhooked the largest, carried it upstairs and

deposited it on the floor of an unfurnished bedroom. The staircase ran steep and straight up from the hall into a long corridor with more casements opening on the orchard behind. The bedroom at one end was dedicated to the hope of Michael Fane's occupation and was always referred to in letters as his: '*By the way I put the largest dish-cover in your bedroom.*' The next two bedrooms were also empty and belonged in spirit to the friends with whom Guy had lived during his last year at Oxford. The fourth was his own, very simply and sparsely furnished in comparison with the bedroom up in the roof which was intended for Miss Peasey. The preparation of that for an elderly unmarried woman had involved a certain voluptuousness of rep and fumed oak and heavily decorated china, the fruit of the second-best bedroom in the house of the dish-covers. As Guy went up the crooked stairs and knocked his head on three successive beams, he hoped Miss Peasey would not be as disproportionately large as the kitchen dresser. Her handwriting had been spidery enough, and he pictured her hopefully as small and wizened. Miss Peasey's bower with the big dormer window surveying the tree-tops of the orchard was certainly a success, and Guy saw that Michael had with happy intuition of female aspiration hung on the wall opposite her bed a large steel-engraving of Doré's Martyrs, which had been included with two hammocks and a fishing-rod in one of the odd lots lightly bid for at the auction. There did not seem anything else she could want; so, having killed a bluebottle with a tartan pincushion, he came downstairs.

Guy had left his own room to the last, partly because he regretted so much the delay in the arrival of those books and partly because, however inadequately equipped was the rest of the house, this room was always the final justification of his tenancy. It was a larger room than any of the others, for the corridor did not cut off its share of the back. It

possessed, in addition to the usual window looking out over the western side of the valley, a very large bay which hung right over the stream, with a view of the orchard, of the church-steeple, of the water-meadows beyond and of the wold rolling across the horizon. This morning Michael and he had pushed the furniture into place, had set in order the great wicker chairs and nailed against the wall the frames of green canvas. The floor was covered with a sweet-smelling mat of Abingdon rushes ; and the curtains of his old rooms in Balliol were hung in place, dim green curtains sown with golden fleurs-de-lys. The ivory image of an emaciated saint standing on the mantelshelf between candlesticks of old wrought iron was probably a Spanish Virgin, but Guy preferred to say she was Saint Rose of Lima because '*O Rose of Lima*' seemed a wonderful apostrophe to begin a poem. Nothing indeed remained for the room's perfection but to fill the new bookshelves on either side of the fireplace. Why had he not hired a cart in Shipcot ? They would have been here by now, and he would actually have been able to begin work to-night, setting thus a noble period to these last six weeks of preparation.

Guy dragged a chair into the bay window and, balancing his long legs on the sill, he made numerous calculations in which Miss Peasey's wages, the weekly bills for food, and the number of times he would have to go up to London were set against £150 a year. When he woke up, the lime-trees that bordered the high road had flung their shadows half-way across the meadow, and the air was a fume of golden gnats against the dipping sun. Within ten minutes the sun vanished, and the mists began to rise. Guy, feeling rather chilly and ashamed of himself for falling asleep, rose hurriedly and went up into the town. He interviewed the driver of the omnibus and told him to look out for his books, and as an afterthought he mentioned the arrival of Miss Peasey. He wished now he had written and told his

housekeeper to spend the night in Oxford ; and he hoped she would not be prejudiced against Plashers Mead by a five-mile drive in a cold omnibus after her tiring journey from Cardiff. He dawdled about the steep village street for a while, gossiping with tradesmen at their doors and watching the warmth fade out of the grey houses in the falling dusk. Then he went to eat his last meal in the Stag Inn.

After supper Guy returned to Plashers Mead, wandering round the house, dropping a great deal of candle-grease everywhere and working himself up into a state of anxiety over Miss Peasey's advent. It would be terrible if she demanded her fare back to Wales the moment she arrived ; and to propitiate her he put the best lamp in the kitchen, whence (as with such illumination it looked more than ever protuberant) he took another dish-cover up to Michael's bedroom. Since it was still but a few minutes after eight and the omnibus would not come for another hour and a half, he lit all the wax candles in his own room and wondered what to do. The tall shadows wavering in the draught were seeming cold and uncomfortable without a fire, so he restlessly threw back the curtains of the bay window to watch the rising of the moon. At that instant her rim appeared above the black hills, and presently a great moon of dislustred gold swam along the edge of the earth. Although she appeared to shed no light, the valley responded to her presence, and Guy was lured from his room to walk for a while in the dews.

Out in the orchard a heavy mist wrapped him in wet folds of silver ; yet overhead there was clear starlight, and he could watch the slow burnishing of the moon's face in her voyage up the sky. It was a queer country in which he found himself, where all the tree-tops seemed to be floating away from invisible trunks, and where for a while no sound was audible but his own footsteps making a music almost

of violins in the saturated grass. The moon wrought upon the vapours a shifting damascene; and far behind, as it seemed, a rufous stain showed where the candles in his room were still alight. Gradually a variety of sounds began to play upon the silence. He could hear the dry squeak of a bat and cows munching in the meadows on the other side of the stream. The stream itself babbled and was still, babbled and was still; while along the bank voles were taking the water with splashes that went up and down a scale like the deep notes of a dulcimer. Far off, an owl hooted, an otter barked; and then as he crossed the middle of the orchard he was hearing nothing but apples fall with solemn thud, until the noise of the lock-gate swallowed all lighter sounds. Here the mist had temporarily dissolved, and in the moonlight he could see water gushing forth like an arch of lace and the long bramble-sprays combing the shallows below. Soon the orchard was left behind, and he was in the mist of a wide meadow, where all was silent again except for the faint sobbing of the grass to his footsteps. He walked straight into the moon's face, stumbling from time to time over molehills with an eery fragrance of fresh-turned soil, and wishing he could ever say in verse a little of the magic this autumnal night was shedding upon his fancy.

"By gad, if I can't write here, I ought to be shot," he declared.

The church-clock struck the half-hour as appositely as if his own father had said something about the need for hurrying up and showing what he could do.

"Ah, but I'm not going to be hurried," said Guy aloud. And since the clock could not answer him again, it was as good as having the best of an argument.

Guy walked on, and after a while could hear once more the purling of the stream. He thought there was something strangely human about this river in the way it wandered so

careless of direction. When he had left these banks, they had been going away from him: now here they were coming back like himself toward the moon, so that presently he was able without changing his course to walk under their border of willows. The mist had drifted away from the stream, leaving the spires of loosestrife plainly visible and more dimly on the other side the forms of huge cattle at pasture. There was, too, a smell of meadowsweet softening with a summer languor the sharp September night. The willows gave way to overhanging thickets of hawthorn, as the river suddenly swept round to make a noose that was completed but a few yards ahead of where he was standing. He could not see on account of the bushes the size of the peninsula so formed, and when suddenly he heard from the depths a sound of laughter, so full was his brain of moonshine that if he had come face to face with a legendary queen of fairies, he would hardly have been surprized. It was with the deliberate encouragement of a vision surpassing all the fantasies of moon and mist that Guy stopped; and indeed, on a sensuous impulse to pamper his imagination with an unsolved mystery he had almost turned round to go back. Curiosity, however, was too strong; for, as he paused irresolute, the fairy mirth tinkling again from the recesses of that bewitched enclosure died away upon the murmur of a conversation, and he could not leave any longer inviolate that screen of hawthorns.

In the apogee of the river's noose two girls, clearly seen against the silver glooms beyond, were bending over a basket. Their heads were close together, and it was not until Guy was almost on top of them that he realized how impertinent his intrusion might seem. He drew back blushing, just as one of the girls became aware of his presence and jumped up with an 'oh' that floated away from her as lightly as a moth upon the moonshine. Her sister (Guy decided at once they were sisters) jumped up

also and luckily for him, since it offered the opportunity of a natural apology, overturned the basket. For a moment the three of them gazed at one another over the mushrooms that were tumbled upon the grass to be an elfin city of the East, so white and cold were their cupolas under the moon.

"Can't I help to pick them up?" Guy asked, wondering to himself why on this night of nights that was the real beginning of Plashers Mead he should be blessed by this fortunate encounter. The two girls were wearing big white coats of some rough tweed or frieze on which the mist lay like gossamer; and, as neither of them had a hat, Guy could see that one was very dark and the other fair.

"We wondered who you were," said the dark one.

"I live at Plashers Mead," said Guy.

"I know, I've seen you often," she answered.

"And Father says every day 'My dears, I really must call upon that young man.'"

It was the fair one who spoke, and Guy recognized that it was her laughter he had first heard.

"My other sister is somewhere close by," said the dark one.

Guy was kneeling down to gather up the mushrooms, and he looked round to see another white figure coming toward them.

"Oh, Margaret, do let's introduce him to Monica. It will be such fun," cried the fair sister.

Guy saw that Margaret was shaking her head, but nevertheless when the third sister came near enough she did introduce him. Monica was more like Margaret, but much fairer than the first fair sister; and with her reserve and her pale gold hair she seemed, as she greeted him, to be indeed a wraith of the moon.

"Shall I carry the mushrooms back for you?" Guy offered.

"Oh, no thanks," said Monica quickly. "The Rectory is quite out of your way."

He felt the implication of an eldest sister's disapproval, and not wishing to spoil the omens of romance, he left the three sisters by the banks of the Greenrush and was soon on his way home through the webs of mist.

How extraordinary that he and Michael should have spent six weeks at Wychford without realizing that the Rector had three such daughters. Godbold had gossiped about him only this afternoon, reporting that he was held by some of his parishioners to be in with the Pope: they might more justly suspect him of being in with Titania. Monica, Margaret . . . he had not heard the name of the third. Monica had seemed a little frigid, but Margaret and . . . really when the omnibus arrived he must find out the name of the Rector's third daughter, of that one so obviously the youngest with her light brown hair and her laugh of which even now, as he paused, he fancied he could still hear the melodious echo. Monica, Margaret and . . . Rose perhaps, for there had been something of a dewy eglantine about her. Surely that was indeed the echo of their voices; but, as upon distance the wayward sound eluded him, the belfry-clock with whirr and buzz and groan made preparation to strike the hour. Nine strokes boomed, leaving behind them a stillness absolute. The poet thought of time before him, of the three sisters by the river, of fame to come, and of his own fortune in finding Plashers Mead. Four months ago he had been in Macedonia, full of proconsular romance, and now he was in England with a much keener sense of every moment's potentiality than he had ever known in the dreams of oriental dominion. This sublunary adventure indicated how great a richness of pastoral life lay behind the slumber of a forgotten town; and it was seeming more than ever a pity Michael had not waited until to-night, so that he also might have met Monica

and Margaret and that smallest innominate sister with the light brown hair. Guy could not help arranging with himself for his friend to fall in love with one of them ; and since he at once allotted Monica to Michael, he knew that he himself preferred one of the others. But which ? Oh, it was ridiculous to ask such questions after seeing three girls for three minutes of moonlight. Perhaps it really had been sorcery and in the morning, when he met them in Wychford High Street, they would appear dull and ordinary. They could not be so beautiful as he thought they were, he decided, since if they were he must have heard of their beauty. Nevertheless it was in a mood of almost elated self-congratulation that Guy found himself hurrying through the orchard toward the candlelight of his room.

The arrival of Miss Peasey, now that it was upon him, banished everything else ; and instead of dreaming deliciously of that encounter in the water-meadows, he stood meditating on the failure of the kitchen. As he regarded the enormous dresser ; the table trampling upon the fender ; the seven dish-covers mocking his poor crockery, Guy had little hope that Miss Peasey would stay a week : and then suddenly, worse than any failure of equipment, he remembered that she might be hungry. He looked at his watch. A quarter-past nine. Of course she would be hungry. She probably had eaten nothing but a banana since breakfast in Cardiff. Guy rushed out and surprized the landlord of the Stag by begging him to send the hostler down at once with cold beef and stout and cheese.

"There's the bus," he cried. "Don't forget. At once. My new housekeeper. Long journey. And salad. Forgot she'd be hungry. Salt and mustard. I've got plates."

The omnibus went rumbling past, and Guy followed at a jog-trot down the street, saw it cross the bridge and, making a spurt, caught it up just as a woman alighted by the gate of Plashers Mead.

"Ah, Miss Peasey," said Guy breathlessly. "I went up the street to see if the bus was coming. Have you had a comfortable journey?"

"Mr. Hazlewood?" asked the new housekeeper blinking at him.

The guard of the omnibus at this moment informed Guy that he had some cases for Plashers Mead.

"Where is Mr. Hazlewood then?" asked Miss Peasey turning sharply.

Over her shoulder Guy saw that the guard was apparently punching the side of his head, and he said more loudly:

"I'm Mr. Hazlewood."

"I thought you were. I'm a little bit deaf after travelling, so you'll kindly speak slightly above the usual, Mr. Hazlewood."

"I hope you've had a comfortable journey," Guy shouted.

"Oh, yes, I think I shall," she said with what Guy fancied was meant to be an encouraging smile. "I hope you haven't lost any of my parcels, young man," she continued with a severe glance at the guard.

"Four and a stringbag. Is that right, mum?" he bellowed. "She's as deaf as an adder, Mr. Hazlewood," he explained confidentially. "We had a regular time getting of her into the bus before we found out she couldn't hear what was being said to her. Oh, very obstinate she was."

"This is the garden," Guy shouted, as they passed in through the gate.

"Yes, I daresay," Miss Peasey replied ambiguously.

Guy wondered how she would ever be got upstairs to her room.

"This is the hall," he shouted. "Rather unfurnished I'm afraid."

"Oh, yes, I'm quite used to the country," said Miss Peasey.

Guy was now in a state of nervous indecision. Just as he was going to shout to Miss Peasey that the kitchen was through the baize-door, the hostler from the Stag came up to know whether mutton would do instead of beef, and just as he said pork would be better than nothing, the guard arrived with Miss Peasey's tin box and wanted to know where he should put it. The hall seemed to be thronged with people.

"You'd like your boxes upstairs, wouldn't you?" he shouted to the housekeeper.

"Oh, do you want to come upstairs?" she said cheerfully.

"No, your boxes. The kitchen's in here."

He really hustled her into the kitchen and, having got her at last in a well-lighted room, he begged her to sit down and expect her supper. By this time two men who had been summoned by the driver of the omnibus to bring in Guy's books, were staggering and sweating into the hall. However, the confusion relaxed in time; and before the clock struck ten Guy was alone with Miss Peasey and without an audience was managing to make her understand most of what he was saying.

"I'll come down in about half an hour," he told her, "and show you your room."

"It's a long way," said Miss Peasey, when the moment was arrived to conduct her up the winding staircase to her bower in the roof. Guy had calculated that she would miss all the beams, and so from a desire to make the best of the staircase he had not mentioned them. He sighed with relief when she passed into her bedroom, unbumped.

"Oh, quite nice," she pronounced looking round her.

"In the morning, we'll talk over everything," said Guy, and with a hurried good-night he rushed away.

In the hall he attacked with a chisel the first packing-case. One by one familiar volumes winked at him with their gold lettering in the candlelight. He chose Keats to take up-

stairs and, having read St. Agnes' Eve, stood by the window of his bedroom, poring upon the moonlit valley.

In bed his mind skipped the stress of Miss Peasey's arrival and fled back to the meadows where he had been walking.

"Monica, Margaret . . ." he began dreamily. It was a pity he had forgotten to find out the name of that sister who was so like a wild rose. Never mind: he would find out to-morrow. And for the second time that day the word lulled him like an opiate.

October

IT was a blowy afternoon early in October, and Pauline was sitting by the window of what at Wychford Rectory was still called the nursery. The persistence of the old name might almost be taken as symbolic of the way in which time had glided by that house unrecognized, for here were Monica, Margaret and Pauline grown up before anyone had thought of changing its name even to schoolroom. And with the old name it had preserved the character childhood had lent it. There was not a chair that did not appear now like the veteran survivor of childish wars and misappropriations, nor any table nor cupboard that did not testify to an affectionate ill-treatment prolonged over many years. On the walls the paper which had once been vivid in its expression of primitive gaiety was now faded: but the pattern of berries, birds and daisies still displayed that eternally unexplored tangle as freshly as once it was displayed for childish fancies of adventure. Pauline had always loved the window-seat, and from here she had always seen before anyone else at the Rectory the first flash of Spring's azure eyes, the first greying of Winter's locks. So, now on this afternoon she could see the bullying South-west wind thunderous against whatever laggards of Summer still tried to shelter themselves in the Rectory garden. Occasionally a few raindrops seemed to effect a frantic escape from the fierce assault and cling desperately to the window-panes, but since nobody could call it a really wet day Pauline had been protesting all the afternoon against her sisters' unwillingness to go out. Staying indoors was such a surrender to the season.

"We ought to practise that Mendelssohn trio," Monica argued.

"I hate Mendelssohn," Pauline retorted.

"Well, I shall practise the piano part."

"Oh, Monica, it will sound so dreadfully empty," cried Pauline. "Won't it, Margaret?"

"I'm reading Mansfield Park. Don't talk," Margaret murmured. "If I could write like Jane Austen," she went on dreamily, "I should be the happiest person in the world."

"Oh, but you are the happiest person already," said Pauline. "At least you ought to be, if you'd only . . ."

"You know I hate you to talk about him," Margaret interrupted.

Pauline was silent. It was always a little alarming when Margaret was angry. With Monica one took for granted the disapproval of a fastidious nature, and it was fun to teaze her; but Margaret with her sudden alternations of hardness and sympathy, of being great fun and frightfully intolerant, it was always wiser to propitiate. So Pauline stayed in the window-seat, pondering mournfully the lawn mottled with leaves, and the lily-pond that was being seamed and crinkled by every gust of the wind that skated across the surface. The very high grey wall against which the Japanese quinces spread their peacock-tails of foliage was shutting her out from the world to-day, and Pauline wished it were Summer again so that she could hurry through the little door in the wall and across the paddock to the banks of the Greenrush. In the Rectory punt she would not have had to bother with sisters who would not come out for a walk when they were invited.

The tall trees on either side of the lawn roared in the wind and showered more leaves upon the angry air. What a long time it was to Summer, and for no reason that she could have given herself Pauline began to think about the man who had taken Plashers Mead. Of course it was obvious

he would fall in love either with Monica or with Margaret, and really it must be managed somehow that he should chose Monica. Everybody fell in love with Margaret, which was so hard on poor Richard out in India who was much the nicest person in the world and whom Margaret must never give up. Pauline looked at her sister and felt afraid the new tenant of Plashers Mead would fall in love with her, for Margaret was so very adorable with her slim hands and her sombre hair.

"Really almost more like a lily than a girl," thought Pauline. Somehow the comparison reassured her, since it was impossible to think of anyone's rushing to gather a lily without a great deal of hesitation.

"I wish poor Richard would write and tell her she is like a lily, instead of always writing such a lot about the bridge he is building, though I expect it's a very wonderful bridge."

After all, Monica with her glinting evanescence was just as beautiful as Margaret, and even more mysterious; and if she only would not be so frightening to young men, who would not fall in love with her! Pauline wondered vaguely if she could not persuade Margaret to go away for a month, so that the new tenant of Plashers Mead might have had time to fall irremediably in love with Monica before she came back. Richard would certainly be dreadfully worried out in India when he heard of a young man at Plashers Mead, and certainly rather . . . yes, certainly in church on Sunday he had appeared rather charming. It was only last Spring that poor Richard had wished he could be living in Plashers Mead himself, and they had had several long discussions which never shed any light upon the problem of how such an ambition would be gratified.

"I expect Monica will be like ice, and Margaret will seem so much easier to talk to, and if I dared to suggest that Monica should unbend a little, she would freeze me as well. Oh, it's all very difficult," sighed Pauline to herself, "and

perhaps I'd better not try to influence things. Only if he does seem to like Margaret much better than Monica, I shall have to bring poor Richard into the conversation, which always makes Margaret cross for days."

As she came to this resolution, Pauline looked half apprehensively at her sister reading in the tumbledown armchair by the fire. How angry Margaret would be if she guessed what was being plotted, and Pauline actually jumped when she suddenly declared that Mansfield Park was almost the best book Jane Austen ever wrote.

"Is it, darling Margaret ?" said Pauline with a disarming willingness to be told again that it certainly was.

"Or perhaps Emma," Margaret murmured, and Pauline hid herself behind the curtains. How droll Father had been about the 'new young creature' at Plashers Mead. It had been so difficult to persuade him to interrupt one precious afternoon of planting bulbs to do his duty either as a neighbour or as Rector of the parish. And when he came back all he would say of the visit was :

"Very pleasant, my dears, oh, yes, he showed me everything, and he really has a most remarkable collection of dish-covers, quite remarkable. But I ought not to have deserted those irises that Garstin sent me from the Taurus. Now perhaps we shall manage that obstinate little plum-coloured brute which likes the outskirts of a pine-forest, so they tell me."

Just as Pauline was laughing to herself at the memory of her father's visit, the Rector himself appeared on the lawn. He was in his shirt-sleeves : his knees were muddy with kneeling : and Birdwood the gardener, all blown about by the wind, was close behind him, carrying an armful of roots.

Pauline threw up the window with a crash and called out :

"Father, Father, what a darling you look, and your hair will be swept right away, if you aren't careful."

The Rector waved his trowel remotely, and Pauline blew him kisses, until she was made aware of protests in the room behind her.

"Really," exclaimed Monica. "You are so noisy. You're almost vulgar."

"Oh, no, Monica," cried Pauline dancing round the room. "Not vulgar. Not a horrid little vulgar person!"

"And what a noise you do make," Margaret joined in. "Please, Pauline, shut the window."

At this moment Mrs. Grey opened the door and loosed a whirlwind of papers upon the nursery.

"Who's vulgar? Who's vulgar?" asked Mrs. Grey laughing absurdly. "Why, what a tremendous draught!"

"Mother, shut the door, the door," expostulated Margaret and Monica simultaneously. "And do tell Pauline to control herself sometimes."

"Pauline, control yourself," said Mrs. Grey.

When the papers were settling down, Janet the maid came in to say there was a gentleman in the drawing-room, and in the confusion of the new whirlwind her entrance raised, Janet was gone before anyone knew who the gentleman was.

"Ugh," Margaret grumbled. "I never can be allowed to read in peace."

"I was practising the Mendelssohn trio, Mother," said Monica reproachfully.

"Let us all practise. Let us all practise," Mrs. Grey proposed, beaming enthusiastically upon her daughters. "That would be charming."

"Father is so sweet," said Pauline. "He's simply covered with mud."

"Has he got his kneeler?" asked Mrs. Grey.

Pauline rushed to the window again.

"Mother says 'have you got your kneeler'?"

The Rector paused vaguely, and Birdwood tried to indicate by kicking himself that he had the kneeler.

"Ah, thoughtful Birdwood," said Mrs. Grey in a satisfied voice.

"And now do you think we might have the window shut?" asked Margaret resignedly.

Monica was quite deliberately thumping at the piano part she was practising. Mrs. Grey sat down and began to tell a long story in which three poor people of Wychford got curiously blended somehow into one, so that Pauline, who was the only daughter that ever listened, became very sympathetic over a fourth poor person who had nothing to do with the tale.

"And surely Janet came in to say something about the drawing-room," said Mrs. Grey as she finished.

"She said a gentleman," Pauline declared.

"Oh, how vague you all are," exclaimed Margaret, jumping up.

"Well, Margaret, you were here," Pauline said. "And so was Monica."

"But I was practising," said Monica primly. "And I didn't hear a word Janet said."

There was always this preliminary confusion at the Rectory when a stranger was announced, and it always ended in the same way by Mrs. Grey and Monica going down first, by Pauline rushing after them and banging the door as they were greeting the visitor, and by Margaret strolling in when the stage of comparative ease had been attained. So it fell out on this occasion, for Monica's skirt was just disappearing round the drawing-room door when Pauline, horrified at the idea of having to come in by herself, cleared the last three stairs of the billowy flight with a leap and sent Monica spinning forward as the door propelled her into the room.

"Monica, I am so sorry."

"Pauline! Pauline!" said Mrs. Grey reprovingly. "So like an avalanche always."

Guy, who had by now been waiting nearly a quarter of an hour, came forward a little shyly.

"How d'ye do, how d'ye do," said Mrs. Grey quickly and nervously. "We're so delighted to see you. So good of you . . . charming really. Pauline is always impetuous. You've come to study farming at Wychford haven't you? Most interesting. Don't tug at me, Pauline. Monica, do ring for tea. Are you fond of music?"

Pauline withdrew from the conversation after the whispered attempt to correct her mother about Mr. Hazlewood's having taken Plashers Mead in order to be a farmer. She wanted to contemplate the visitor without being made to involve herself in the confusions of politeness. 'Was he dangerous to Richard?' she asked herself, and alas, she had to tell herself that indeed it seemed probable he might be. Of course he was inevitably on the way to falling in love with Margaret, and as she looked at him with his clear-cut pale face, his tumbled hair and large brown eyes which changed what seemed at first a slightly cynical personality to one that was almost a little wistful, Pauline began to speculate if Margaret might not herself be rather attracted to him. This was an unforeseen complication, for Margaret so far had only accepted homage. Pauline definitely began to be jealous for Richard whose homage had been the most prodigal of any; and as Guy drawled on about his first adventure of house-keeping she told herself he was affected. The impression, too, of listening to someone more than usually self-possessed and cynical revived in her mind; and those maliciously drooping lids were obliterating the effect of the brown eyes. Sitting by herself in the oriel-window Pauline was nearly sure she did not like him. He had no business to be at the Rectory when Richard was building a bridge out in India; and now here was Margaret strolling

graciously in and almost at once obviously knowing so well how to get on with this idler. Oh, positively she disliked him. So cold and so cruel was that mouth, and so vain he was, as he sat there bending forward over hand-clasped, long, stupid, crossed legs. What right had he to laugh with Margaret about their father's visit ? This stranger had assuredly never appreciated him. He was come here to spoil the happiness of Wychford, to destroy the immemorial perfection of life at the Rectory. And why would he keep looking up at herself ? Margaret could be pleasant to anybody, but this intruder would soon find that she herself was loyal to the absent. Pauline wished that, when he met them all on that night of the moon, she had been so horridly rude as to make him avoid the family for ever. How could Margaret sit there talking so unconcernedly, when Richard might be dying of sunstroke at this very moment ? Margaret was heartless, and this stranger with his drawl and his undergraduate affectation would encourage her to sneer at everything.

" What's the matter, Pauline dearest ? " her mother turned round to ask.

" Nothing," answered Pauline, biting her lips to keep back surely the most unreasonable tears she had ever felt were springing.

" You're not cross with me for calling you a landslide ? " persisted Mrs. Grey, smiling at her from the midst of a glory momentarily shed by a stormy ray of sunshine.

" Oh, mother," said Pauline, now fairly in the midway between laughter and tears. " It was an avalanche you called me."

" Why do you always sit near a window ? " asked Monica.

" She always rushes into a corner," said Margaret.

Pauline jumped up from her chair and would have run out of the room forthwith ; but in passing the first table she knocked from it a silver bowl of pot-pourri and

scattered the contents over the carpet. Down she knelt to hide her confusion and repair the damage, and at the same moment Guy plunged down beside her to help. She caught his eyes so tenderly humorous that she too laughed.

"I think it must be my fault," he said. "Don't you remember how, last time we met, your sister upset the mushrooms ?"

Pauline knew she was blushing, and when the rose-leaves were all gathered up, tea came in. Her attention was now entirely occupied by preventing her mother from doing the most ridiculous things with cakes and sugar and milk, and when tea was over, Guy got up to go.

There was a brief discussion after his departure, in which Margaret was so critical of his dress and of his absurdities that Pauline was reassured, and presently indeed found herself taking their visitor's part against her sisters.

"Quite right, quite right, Pauline," said Mrs. Grey. "He's charming . . . charming . . . charming ! Margaret and Monica so critical. Always so critical."

Presently the family hurried out into the drive to protest against the Rector's planting any more bulbs, to tell him how unkind he had been not to come in to tea, and to warn him that the bell would sound for Evensong in two minutes. He was dragged out of the shrubbery where he had been superintending a clearance of aucubas, preparatory to planting a drift of new and very deep yellow primroses.

"Really, my dears, I have never seen Primula Vulgaris so fine in texture or colour. My friend Gilmour has spent ten years working up the stock. As large as florins."

So he boasted of new wonders next Spring in the Rectory garden, while his wife and daughters brushed him and dusted him and helped to button up his cassock.

"Doesn't Father look a darling ?" demanded Pauline, as they watched the tall handsome dreamer striding along

the drive towards the sound of the bell, that was clanging loud and soft in its battle with the wind.

"Oh, Pauline, run after him," said Mrs. Grey, "and remind him it's the Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity. He started wrong last Sunday, and to-day's Wednesday, and it so offends some of the congregation."

Pauline overtook her father in the church-porch, and he promised he would be careful to read the right collect. She had not stayed to get a hat and therefore must wait for him outside.

"Very well, my dear child, I shan't be long. Do go and see if those Sternbergias I planted against the south porch are in flower. Dear me, they should be, you know, after this not altogether intolerably overcast summer. Sun, though, sun! they want sun, poor dears!"

"But, Father, I can't remember what Sternbergias look like."

"Oh, yes, you can," said the Rector. "Sternbergia Lutea. Amaryllidaceae. A perfectly ordinary creature." And he vanished in the gloom of the priest's door.

As Pauline came round the corner the wind was full in her face, and under the rose-edged wrack of driving clouds the churchyard looked desolate and savage. There were no flowers to be seen but beaten down Michaelmas daisies and bedabbled phlox. The bell had stopped immediately when the Rector arrived; and the wind seemed now much louder as it went howling round the great church or rasping through the yews and junipers. The churchyard was bounded on the northerly side by the mill-stream, along which ran a wide path between a double row of willows now hissing and whistling as they were whipped by the blasts. Pauline walked slowly down this unquiet ambulatory, gazing curiously over to the other bank of the stream where the orchard of Plashers Mead was strewn with red apples. There in the corner by the house that was just visible stood

the owner playing with a dog, a bobtail too, which was the kind Pauline liked best. She wanted very much to wave, but of course it was impossible for the Rector's daughter to do anything like that in the churchyard. Yet if he did chance to walk in her direction, she would, whatever happened, shout to him across the stream to bring the dog next time he came to the Rectory. Pauline walked four times up and down the path, but first the dog disappeared and then the owner followed him, and presently Pauline discovered that the path beside the abandoned stream was very dreary. The crooked tombstones stood up starkly: the wind sighed across the green graves of the unknown: the fiery roses were fallen from the clouds. Pauline turned away from the path and went to take shelter behind the East end of the church. From here, as she fronted the invading night, she could see the grey wall of the Rectory garden and the paddock sloping down to the river. How sad it was to think of the months that must pass before that small meadow would be speckled with fritillaries or with irises blow white and purple. The wind shrieked with a sudden gust that seemed more violent, because where she was standing not a blade of grass twitched. Pauline looked up to reassure herself that the steeple was not toppling from the tower; as she did so, a gargoyle grinned down at her. The grotesque was frightening in the dusk, and she hurried round to the priest's door. The Rector came out as she reached it, and accepted vaguely the information that there were no flowers to be seen but Michaelmas daisies and phlox.

"Ah, I told Birdwood to confiscate those abominable dahlias which wretched Mrs. Godbold will plant every year. I gave her some of that new saxifrage I raised. What more does the woman want?"

Pauline hung upon his arm, while they walked back to the Rectory through the darkling plantation.

"Isn't it a perfect place?" she murmured, hugging his

arm closer when they came to the end of the mossy path and saw the twinkling of the drawing-room's oriel on the narrow south side, and the eleven steep gables that cleft the now scarcely luminous sky, one after another all the length of the house.

"I doubt if anything but this confounded cotoneaster would do well against this wall," replied the Rector.

He never failed to make this observation when he reached his front-door; and his family knew that one day the cotoneaster would be torn down for a succession of camellias to struggle with the east winds of unkind Oxfordshire. In the hall Mrs. Grey and Margaret were bending over a table.

"Guy has left his card," said Margaret.

"Is that the man who came to see me about the rats?" asked the Rector.

"No, no, Francis," said Mrs. Grey. "Guy is the young man at Plashers Mead."

"Isn't Francis sweet?" cried Pauline, reaching up to kiss him.

"Hush, Pauline. Pauline, you must not call your father Francis in the hall," said Mrs. Grey.

"How touching of Guy to leave a card," Pauline murmured, looking at the oblong of pasteboard shimmering in the gloom.

"Now we've just time to practise the Mendelssohn trio before dinner," declared Mrs. Grey. "And that will make you warm."

The Rector wandered off to his library. Margaret and Pauline went with their mother up shadowy staircases and through shadowy corridors to the great music-room that ran half the length of the roof. Monica was already seated at the piano, all white and golden herself in the candlelight. Languidly Margaret unpacked her violoncello: Pauline tuned her violin. Soon the house was full of music, and the wind in the night was scarcely audible.

November

WHEN Guy left the Rectory that October afternoon, he felt as if he had put back upon its shelf a book the inside of which, thus briefly glanced at, held for him, whenever he should be privileged to open it again, a new, indeed an almost magical representation of life. On his fancy the Greys had impressed themselves with a kind of abundant naturalness; but however deeply he tried to think he was already plunged into the heart of their life, he realized that it was only in such a way as he might have dipped into the heart of a book. The intimacy revealed was not revealed by any inclusion of himself within the charm; and he was a little sad to think how completely he must have seemed outside the picture. Hence his first aspiration with regard to the family was somehow to become no longer a spectator, but actually a happy player in their representation of existence. Ordinarily, so far as experience had hitherto carried him, it had been easy enough to find himself on terms of intimacy with any group of human beings whose company was sufficiently attractive. For him, perhaps, it had even been particularly easy, so that he had never known the mortification of a repulse. No doubt now by contriving to be himself and relying upon the interest that was sure to be roused by his isolation and poetic ambitions, he would very soon be accorded the freedom of the Rectory. Yet such a prospect, however pleasant to contemplate, did not satisfy him, and he was already troubled by a faint jealousy of the many unknown friends of the Greys to whom in the past the privilege of that freedom must have been frequently

accorded. Guy wanted more than that: in the excess of his appreciation he wanted them to marvel at a time when they had not been aware of his existence: in fact he was anxious to make himself necessary to their own sense of their own completeness. As he entered his solitary hall, he was depressed by the extravagance of such a desire, saying to himself that he might as well sigh to become an integral figure of a pastoral by Giorgione, or of any work of art the life of which seems but momentarily stilled for the pleasure of whomsoever is observing it.

Guy was for a while almost impatient even of his own room, for he felt it was lacking in any atmosphere except the false charm of novelty. He had been here three weeks now, he and deaf Miss Peasey; and were the two of them swept away to-morrow, Plashers Mead would adapt itself to newcomers. There was nothing wrong with the house: such breeding would survive any occupation it might be called upon to tolerate. On the other hand were chance to sweep the Greys from Wychford, so essentially did the Rectory seem their creation that already it was unimaginable to Guy apart from them. And as yet he had only dipped into the volume. Who could say what exquisite and intimate paragraphs did not await a more leisurely perusal? Really, thought Guy, he might almost suppose himself in love with the family, so much did the vision of them in that shadowy drawing-room haunt his memory. Indeed they were become a picture that positively ached in his mind with longing for the moment of its repetition. For some days he spent all his time in the orchard, throwing sticks for his new bobtail; denying himself with an absurd self-consciousness the pleasure of walking so far along the mill-stream even as the bank opposite to the Rectory paddock; denying himself a fortuitous meeting with any of the family in Wychford High Street; and on Sunday denying himself the pleasure of seeing them in church, because he felt it

might appear an excuse to be noticed. The vision of the Rectory obsessed him, but so elusively that when in verse he tried to state the emotion merely for his own satisfaction he failed, and he took refuge from his disappointment by nearly always being late for meals. Often he would see Miss Peasey walking about the orchard with desolate tinkle of a Swiss sheep-bell, the only instrument of summons that the house possessed. Miss Peasey herself looked not unlike a battered old bell-wether, as she wandered searching for him in the wind; and Guy used to watch her from behind a tree-trunk, laughing to himself until Bob the dog trotted from one to another, describing anxious circles round their separation.

"Your dinner's been waiting ten minutes, Mr. Hazlewood!"

"Doesn't matter," Guy would shout.

"Mutton to-day," Miss Peasey would say, and, "a little variety," she always added.

Miss Peasey's religion was variety, and her tragedy was an invention that never kept pace with aspiration. For three weeks Guy had been given on Sunday roast beef which lasted till Wednesday; while on Thursday he was given roast mutton, which as a depressing cold bone always went out from the dining-room on Saturday night. Every morning he was asked what he would like for dinner, to which he always replied that he left it to her. Once indeed in a fertile moment he had suggested a curry, and Miss Peasey, brightening wonderfully, had chirped:

"Ah, yes, a little variety."

But in the evening the taste of hot tin that represented Miss Peasey's curry made him for ever afterward leave the variety to her own fancy, thereby preserving henceforth that immutable alternation of roast beef and roast mutton which was the horizon of her house-keeping.

These solitary meals were lightened by the thought of

the Rectory. Neither beef nor mutton seemed of much importance, when his mind's eye could hold that shadowy drawing-room. There was Monica with her pale gold hair in the stormy sunlight, cold and shy, but of such a marble purity of line that but to sit beside her was to admire a statue whose coldness made her the more admirable. There was Margaret, carved slimly out of ivory, very tall with weight of dusky hair, and slow fastidious voice that spoke dreamily of the things Guy loved best. There was Pauline sitting away from the others in the window seat, away in her shyness and wildness. Was not the magic of her almost more difficult to recapture than any? A briar rose she was whose petals seemed to fall at the touch of definition, a briar rose that was waving out of reach, even of thought. Guy wished he could visualize the Rector in his own drawing-room; but instead he had to set him in Plashers Mead, of which no doubt he had thought the owner a young ass; and Guy blushed to remember the nervous idiocy which had let him take the Rector solemnly into the kitchen to look at dish-covers in a row, and deaf Miss Peasey sitting by as much fire as the table would yield to her chair. But if the Rector were missing from the picture, at any rate he could picture Mrs. Grey, shy like her daughters and with a delicious vagueness all her own. She was most like Pauline, and indeed in Pauline Guy could see her mother, as the young moon holds in her lap the wraith of the old moon. . . .

"Why, you haven't eaten anything," remonstrated Miss Peasey, breaking in upon his vision. "And I've made you a rice pudding for a little variety."

The shadowy drawing-room faded with the old chintz curtains and fragile almost immaterial silver; the china bowls of Lowestoft; the dull white panelling and faintly aromatic sweetness. Instead remained a rice pudding that smelt and looked as solid as a pie.

However, that very afternoon Guy was greatly encouraged to get an invitation to dinner at the Rectory from the hands of the gardener. Birdwood was one of those servants who seem to have accepted with the obligations of service the extreme responsibilities of paternity; and Guy hastened to take advantage of the chance to establish himself on good terms with one who might prove a most powerful ally.

"Not much of a garden, I'm afraid," he said deprecatingly to Birdwood, as they stood in colloquy outside. The gardener shook his head.

"It wouldn't do for the Rector to see them cabbages and winter greens. 'I won't have the nasty things in my garden,' he says to me, and he'll rush at them regular ferocious with a fork. 'I won't have them,' he says. 'I can't abear the sight of them,' he says. Well, of course I knows better than go for to contradict him when he gets a downer on any plant, don't matter whether it's cabbage or calceolaria. But last time, when he'd done with his massacring of them, I popped round to Mrs. Grey, and I says, winking at her very hard, but of course not meaning any disrespectfulness, winking at her very hard, I says, 'Please, mum, I want one of these new allotments from the glebe.' 'Good Heavings, Birdwood,' she says, 'whatever on earth can you want with for an allotment?' With that I winks very hard again and says in a low voice right into her ear as you might say, 'To keep the wolf from the door, mum, with a few winter greens.' That's the way we grow our vegetables for the Rectory, out of an allotment, though we have got five acres of garden. Now you see what comes of being a connosher. You take my advice, Mr. Hazlenut, and clear all them cabbages out of sight before the Rector comes round here again."

"I will certainly," Guy promised. "But you know it's a bit difficult for me to spend much money on flowers."

"*We* don't spend money over at the Rectory," said Birdwood, smiling in a superior way.

"No ?"

"*We* don't spend a penny. *We* has every mortal plant and seed and cutting given to us. And not only that, but we gives in our turn. Look here, Mr. Hazlenut, I'm going to hand you out a bit of advice. The first time as you go round our garden with the Rector, when you turn into the second wall-garden, and see a border on your right, you catch hold of his arm and say, 'Why, good Heavings, if that isn't a new berberis."

"Yes, but I don't know what an old berberis looks like," said Guy hopelessly. "Let alone a new one."

"Never mind what the old ones look like. It's the new I'm telling you of. Don't you understand that everyone who comes down, from Kew even, says, 'That's a nice healthy little lot of Berberis Knightii as you've got a hold of.' 'Ha,' says the Rector. 'I thought as you'd go for to say that. But it ain't Knightii,' he chuckles, 'and what's more it ain't got a name yet, only a number, being a new importation from China,' he says. You go and call out what I told you, and he'll be so pleased, why, I wouldn't say he won't shovel half of the garden into your hands straight off."

"Do the young ladies take an interest in flowers ?" Guy asked.

"Of course they try," said Birdwood condescendingly. "But neither them nor their mother don't seem to learn nothing. They think more of a good clump of dellyphiniums than half-a-dozen meconopises as someone's gone mad to discover, with a lot of murderous Lammers from Tibbet ready to knife him the moment his back's turned."

"Really ?"

"Oh, I was like that myself once. I can remember the time when I was as fond of a good dahlia as anything. Now

I goes sniffing the ground to see if there's any Mentha Requieni left over from the frost."

"Sniffing the ground?"

"That's right. It's so small that if it wasn't for the smell anyone wouldn't see it. That's *worth* growing that is. Only, if you'll understand me, it takes anyone who's used to looking at peonies and suchlike a few years to find out the object of a plant that isn't any bigger than a pimple on an elephant."

Guy was reluctant to let Birdwood go without bringing him to talk more directly of the family and less of the flowers. At the same time he felt it would be wiser not to rouse in the gardener any suspicion of how much he was interested in the Rectory: he was inclined to think he might resent it, and he wanted him as a friend.

"Who is working in your garden?" asked Birdwood, as he turned to go.

"Well, nobody just at present," said Guy apologetically.

"All right," Birdwood announced. "I'll get hold of someone for you in less than half a pig's whisper."

"But not all the time," Guy explained quickly. He was worried by the prospect of a gardener's wages coming out of his small income.

"Once a week he'll come in," said Birdwood.

Guy nodded.

"What's his name?"

"Graves he's called, but being deaf and dumb, his name's not of much account."

"Deaf and dumb?" repeated Guy. "But how shall I explain what I want done?"

"I'll show you," said Birdwood. "I'll come round and put you in the way of managing him. Work? I reckon that boy would work any other mortal in Wychford to the bone. Work? Well, he can't hear nothing, and he can't

say nothing, so what else can he do? And he does it. Good afternoon, Mr. Hazlenut."

And Birdwood retired, whistling very shrilly as he went down the path to the gate.

Two nights later, Guy with lighted lantern in his hand set out to the Rectory. He did not venture to go by the orchard and the fields and so, crossing the narrow bridge over the stream, enter by way of the garden. Such an approach seemed too familiar for the present stage of his friendship, and he took the more formal route through an alley of mediaeval cottages that branched off Wychford High Street. Mysterious lattices blinked at him, and presently he felt the wind coming fresh in his face as he skirted the churchyard. The road continued past the back of a long row of almshouses, and when he saw the pillared gate of the Rectory drive, over which high trees were moaning darkly, Guy wondered if he were going to a large dinner-party. No word had been said of any one else's coming, but with Mrs. Grey's vagueness that portended nothing. He hoped that he would be the only guest and, swinging his lantern with a pleased expectancy, he passed down the drive. Suddenly a figure materialized from the illumination he was casting and hailed him with a questioning 'hulloa'?

"Hulloa," Guy responded.

"Oh, beg your pardon," exclaimed the other. "I thought it was Willsher."

"My name's Hazlewood," said Guy a little stiffly.

"Mine's Brydone. We may as well hop in together.'

Guy rather resented the implication of this birdlike intrusion in company with the doctor's son, a lanky youth whom he had often noticed slouching about Wychford in a cap ostensibly alive with artificial flies. Apparently Willsher must also be expected, against whom Guy had already conceived a violent prejudice dating from the time

he called at his father's office to sign the agreement for the tenancy of Plashers Mead. It was of ill augury that the Greys should apparently be supposing that he would make a trio with Brydone and Willsher.

"Brought a lantern, eh?" said Brydone.

"Yes, this is a lantern," Guy answered coldly.

"You'll never see me with a lantern," Brydone declared.

Guy would like to have retorted that he hoped he would never even see Brydone without one. But he contented himself by saying with all that Balliol could bring to his aid of crushing indifference,

"Oh, really?"

Somebody behind them was running down the drive and shouting 'Hoo-oo' in what Guy considered a very objectionable voice. It probably was Willsher.

"Hullo, Charlie," said Brydone.

"Hullo, Percy," said Willsher, for it was he.

"Know this gentleman? Mr. Hazlewood?"

"Only officially. Pleased to meet you," said the newcomer.

"Not at all," answered Guy. He felt furious to think that the Greys would suppose he had arranged to arrive with these two fellows.

"Done any fishing yet?" asked Brydone.

"No, not yet," said Guy.

"Well, your bit of river has been spoilt. Old Burrows let everyone go there. But when you want some good fishing, Willsher and I rent about a mile of stream farther up and we'll always be glad to give you a day. Eh, Charlie?"

Charlie replied with much cordiality that Percy had taken the very words of invitation out of his mouth; and Guy, unable any longer to be frigid, said that he had some books at which they might possibly care to come and look one afternoon. Mr. Brydone and Mr. Willsher both declared they would be delighted, and the latter added in

the friendliest way that he knew an old woman in Wychford who was very anxious to sell a Milton warranted to be a hundred years old at least. Was that anything in Mr. Hazlewood's way? Guy explained that a Milton of so recent a date was not likely to be much in his way, and Mr. Brydone remarked that no doubt if it had been a Stilton, it would have been another matter. His friend laughed very heartily indeed at this joke, and in an atmosphere of almost hilarious good fellowship, that was to Guy still a little mortifying, they rang the Rectory bell.

None of the family had reached the drawing-room when they were shown in, and Guy was afraid they were rather early.

"Always like this," said Brydone. "Absolutely no notion of time. Shouldn't be surprized if we had to wait another quarter of an hour. Known them for years, and they've always been like this. Eh, Charlie?"

The solicitor's son shook his head gravely. He seemed to feel that as a man of business he should display a slight disapproval of such a casual family.

"Ever since I was a kid I can remember it," he said.

Guy tried to tell himself that all this talk of intimacy was merely due to the accidental associations of country life over many years. But it was with something very like apprehension that he waited for the Greys to come down. It would be dreadful to find that Brydone and Willsher had a status in the Rectory. When, however, their hosts appeared, Guy realized with a tremendous relief that Brydone and Willsher obviously existed outside his picture of the Rectory. To be sure, they were Charlie and Percy to Monica, Margaret and Pauline; but galling as this was, Guy told himself that after a lifelong acquaintance nothing else could be expected.

It pleased Guy really that the dinner was not a great success, for he was able to fancy that the Greys were

encumbered by the presence of Brydone and Willsher. Monica was silent; Margaret was deliberately talking about things that could not possibly interest either of the young men; and Pauline was trying to save the situation by wild enthusiasms which were continually being repressed by her sisters. Mrs. Grey alternated between helping to check Pauline and behaving in exactly the same way herself. As for the Rector, he sat silent with a twinkle in his eye. Guy wished regretfully, when the time came to depart, that he could have stayed another few minutes to mark his superiority to the other guests; but alas, he was still far from that position, and no doubt he would never attain to it.

"Oh, have you brought a lantern?" asked Pauline excitedly in the hall. "Oh, I wish I could walk back with you. I love lantern-light."

"Pauline! Pauline! Do think what you're saying," Mrs. Grey protested.

"I like lantern-light too," Margaret proclaimed.

"When you come to see us again," said Pauline, "will you bring your dog?"

"Oh, I say, shall I?" asked Guy flushing with pleasure.

"Such a lamb, Margaret," said Pauline, kissing her sister impulsively and being straightly reproved for doing so.

The good-nights were all said, and Guy walked up the drive with Brydone and Willsher.

"Queer family, aren't they?" commented the doctor's son.

"Extraordinarily charming," said Guy.

"I've known them all my life," said Willsher a little querulously. "And yet I never seem to know them any better."

Guy was so much elated by this admission that he repeated more warmly his invitation to come and see him and his books, and parted from the two friends very pleasantly.

Two or three days later Guy thought he might fairly make his dinner call, and with much forethought did not take Bob with him, so that soon there might be an excuse to come again to effect that introduction. Mrs. Grey and Monica were out ; and Guy was invited to have tea in the nursery with Margaret and Pauline. He was conscious that an honour had been paid to him, partly by intuition, partly because neither of the girls said a conventional word about not going into the drawing-room. He felt, as he sat in that room fragrant with the memories of what must have been an idyllic childhood, the thrill that, as a child, he used to feel when he read : '*The Queen was in her parlour eating bread and honey.*' This was such another parlour infinitely secluded from the world ; and he thought he had never experienced a more breathless minute of anticipation than when he followed the girls along the corridor to their nursery. The matting worn silky with age seemed so eternally unprofaned, and on the wall outside the door the cuckoo calling five o'clock was like a confident bird in some paradise where neither time nor humanity was of much importance. Janet, the elderly parlourmaid, came stumping in behind them with the nursery tea-things ; and, as Guy sat by the small hob-grate and saw the moist autumnal sun etherealize with wan gold the tattered volumes of childhood, the very plumcake on the tea-table was endowed with the romantic perfection of a cake in a picture-book. When the sun dipped behind the elms, Guy half expected that Margaret and Pauline would vanish too, so exactly seemed they the figures that, were this room a mirage, he would expect to find within as guardians of the rare seclusion. Guy never could say what was talked about, that afternoon ; for when he found himself outside once again in the air of earth, he was bemused with the whole experience, as if suddenly released from enchantment. Out of a multitude of impressions, which had seemed at the time most delicately

strange and potent, only a few incidents quite commonplace haunted his memory tangibly enough to be seized and cherished. Tea-cups floating on laughter against that wall-paper of berries, birds and daisies; a pair of sugar-tongs clicking to the pressure of long white fingers (so much could he recapture of Margaret); crumpets in a rosy mist (so much was Pauline); a copper kettle singing; the lisp of the wind; a disarray of tambour-frames and music, these were all that kept him company on his way back to Plashers Mead through the colourless twilight.

Chance favoured Guy next day by throwing him into the arms of the Rector, who asked if he were fond enough of flowers to look round the garden at a dull season of the year. Guy was so much elated that, if love of flowers meant more frequent opportunities of going to the Rectory, he would have given up poetry to become a professional gardener. Of course there was nothing to see, according to the Rector—a few Nerines of his own crossing in the greenhouse; a Buddleia Auriculata honeycomb-scented in the angle of two walls; the double Michaelmas daisy, an ugly brute already condemned to extermination; a white Red Hot Poker, evidently a favourite of the Rector's by the way he gazed upon it and said so casually Kniphofia Multiflora, as if it were not indeed a treasure blooming in Oxfordshire's dreary Autumn.

"Tulips to go in next week," said the Rector, rolling the prospect upon his tongue with meditative enjoyment. "A friend of mine has just sent me some nice fellows from Bokhara and Turkestan. I ought to get them in this week, but Birdwood must finish with these roses. And I've got a lot of Clusiana too that ought to be in. I am going to try her in competition with shrubbery roots and see if *they'll* make her behave herself."

"Could I come in and help?" offered Guy.

"Well, now that would certainly be most kind," said

the Rector; and his thin handsome face lit up with the excitement of infecting Guy with his own passion. "But aren't you busy?"

"Oh, no. I usually work at night."

So Guy came to plant tulips and from planting tulips to being asked to lunch was not far, and from finishing off a few left over to being asked to tea was not far either. Moreover when the tulips were all planted, there were gladioli to be sorted and put away. Incidentally too the punt had to be caulked and the boathouse had to be strengthened, so that in the end it was half way into November before Guy realized he had been coming to the Rectory almost every day. The more he came, however, the more he was fascinated by the family. They still eluded him, and he was always aware, particularly between Margaret and Pauline, of a life in which as yet he hardly shared. At the same time, so familiar now were the inner places of the house and most of all the nursery, he felt as if happily there would come a day when to none of the sisters would he seem more noticeable than one of their tumbledown armchairs.

Once or twice he stayed to dinner, and the long dining-room with the sea-grey wall-paper and curtains of the strawberry-thief design was always entered with a particular contentment of spirit. The table was very large, for somebody always forgot to take out the extra leaf put in for a dinner sometime last summer, or perhaps two summers ago. The result was that the Rector was far away in the shadows at one end; Mrs. Grey equally remote at the other; while Guy would in turn be near to Margaret or Pauline or even Monica in the middle. Old fashioned glasses with spirals of green and white blown in their stems; silver that was nearly diaphanous with use and age; candlesticks solid as the Ionic columns they counterfeited, or tapering and fluted with branches that carried the candle-flames like

flowers, everything seemed as if it had been created for this room alone. From the wall a lacquered clock as round and big and benign as the setting sun wavered in the coppery shadows of the fire, and with scarcely the sound of a tick showed forth time. Guy had never appreciated the sacredness of eating in good company until he dined casually like this at the Rectory. He never knew what he ate and always accepted what was put before him like manna; yet he was always conscious of having enjoyed the meal, and next morning he used to face, unabashed, Miss Peasey's tale of ruined tapioca which had waited for him too long.

The seal of perfection was generally set on these unexpected dinners by chamber-music afterward, when under the arched roof of the big music-room for an hour or more of trios and quartets Guy contemplated that family. The Greys could not have revealed the design of their life with anything but chamber-music, and setting aside any expression of inward things, thought Guy, how would it be possible to imagine them more externally decorative than seated so at this formal industry of art? He liked best perhaps the trios, when he and Mrs. Grey, each in a Caroline chair with tall wicker back, remained outside, and yet withal as much in the picture as two donors painted by an old Florentine. Monica in a white dress sat straight and stiff with pale gold hair that seemed the very colour of the refined, the almost rarefied accompaniment upon which her fingers quivered and rippled. Something of her own coldness and remoteness and crystalline severity she brought to her instrument, as if upon a windless day a fountain played forth its pattern. Margaret's amber dress deepened from the shade of Monica's hair, and Margaret's eyes glowed deep and solemn as the solemn depths of the violoncello over which she hung with a thought of motherhood in the way she cherished it. Was it she, wondered Guy, who was the ultimate lure of this house, or was it Pauline? Of her,

as she swayed to the violin, nothing could be said but that from a rose-bloomed radiance issued a sound of music. And how clearly in the united effect of the three sisters was written the beauty of their lives. Guy could almost see every hour of their girlhood passing in orderly pattern, as the divine Hours dance along a Grecian frieze. There was neither passion nor sentiment in the music: there was neither sorrow nor regret. It was heartless in its limpid beauty; it was remote as a cloud against the sunrise; cold as water was it, and incommunicable as a dream; yet in solitude when Guy reconjured the sound afterward, it returned to his memory like fire.

A great occasion for Guy was the afternoon when first the Greys came to tea with him at Plashers Mead. Himself went into Wychford and bought the cakes, so many that Miss Peasey held up her hands with that ridiculously conventional gesture of surprize she used, exclaiming:

"Oh, dear, this *is* a variety!"

Guy led them solemnly round the house and furnished the empty rooms with such vivid descriptions that their emptiness was scarcely any longer perceptible. In his own room he waited anxiously for judgment. Margaret was of course the first to declare an opinion. She did not like his curtains nor his green canvas, and she was by no means willing to accept his excuse that they were relics of undergraduate taste.

"If you don't like them now, why do you have them? Why not plain white for the walls and no curtains at all, until you can get ones you really do like?"

Pauline was afraid his feelings would be hurt and declared with such transparent dishonesty how greatly she loved everything in the room that Guy, grateful though he was to her intended sweetness, was more discouraged than ever. Monica objected to his having Our Lady on the mantelshelf, and would not admit her as Saint Rose of

Lima; but Guy was enough in awe of Monica not to justify the identification with Saint Rose by his desire for a poetic apostrophe. As for Mrs. Grey, she behaved as she always did when Monica and Margaret were being critical, that is by firing off 'charmings!' in a sort of benevolent musketry; but if Guy was not convinced by her 'charmings!' he could not resist her when she said:

"I think Guy's room is charming . . . charming!"

He felt his room could be an absolute failure if from the ashes of its reputation he were alluded to actually for the first time as 'Guy.' Gone then was Mr. Hazlewood: fled were those odious 'misses.' He turned to Pauline and said momentously, boldly:

"I say, Pauline, you haven't seen my new kitten."

She blushed, and Guy stood breathless with the attainment of the first peak. Then triumphantly he turned to Mrs. Grey:

"Monica and Margaret are very severe, aren't they?"

How easy it was after all, and he wished he had addressed them directly by their Christian names instead of taking refuge in a timid reference. Now all that was wanting for his pleasure was that Monica, Margaret or Pauline should call him Guy. He wondered which would be the first. And vaguely he asked himself which he wanted to be the first.

Pauline was talking to Margaret in the bay-window.

"Do you remember," she was saying, "when Richard came to look at Plashers Mead and we pretended he was going to take it?"

Margaret frowned at her for answer; but for Guy the afternoon so lately perfected was spoilt again; and when they were gone, all the evening he glowered at phantom Richards who, whether Adonises or Calibans, were all equally obnoxious and more than obnoxious, positively minatory. Next day he felt he had no heart to make an excuse

to visit the Rectory; and he was drearily eating some of the cakes of the tea-party, when Mr. Brydone and Mr. Willsher paid him their first call. Guy did not think they would appreciate the empty rooms, however eloquently he narrated their future glories; so he led his visitors forthwith to the cakes, listening to the talk of trout and jack. After a while he asked with an elaborate indifference if either of them had lately been round to the Rectory.

"Too clever for me," said Brydone shaking his head. "Besides, Pauline kicked up a fuss a fortnight ago because we asked if we could have the otter-meet in their paddock."

"They were never sporting, those Rectory kids," said Willsher gloomily.

"Never," his friend agreed, shaking his head. "Do you remember when Margaret egged on young Richard Ford to punch your head because your old terrier chivied the Greys' cat round the churchyard?"

"I punched *his* head, I remember," said Willsher in wrathful reminiscence.

"Does Richard Ford live here?" Guy asked.

"His father's the Vicar of Little Fairfield, the next parish, you know. Richard's gone to India. He's an engineer, awfully nice chap and head over heels in love with the fair Margaret. I believe there's a sort of engagement."

In that moment by the lightening of his heart Guy knew that he was in love with Pauline.

Outside, the November night hung humid and oppressive.

"I thought we should get it soon," said Willsher, and as the two friends vanished in the mazy garden, Guy looking up felt rain falling softly yet with gathering intensity. He stood for a while in his doorway, held by the whispering blackness. Then suddenly in a rapture of realization he

slammed the door and, singing at the top of his voice, marched about the hall. Once upon a time 'to-morrow' had been wont to drowse him: now the word sounded upon his imagination like a golden trumpet.

WINTER

December

THE rain which began the day after the Greys' visit to Plashers Mead went on almost without a break for a whole week. December with what it could bring of deadness, gloom and moisture came drearily down on Wychford, and Pauline as she sat high in her window-seat lamented the interminable soak.

"I can't think why Guy hasn't been near the Rectory lately," she grumbled.

"I expect he's tired of us," said Margaret.

"You don't really think so," Pauline contradicted. "You're much much *much* too conceited to think so really."

Margaret laughed.

"You don't mind a bit when I call you conceited," Pauline went on, challenging her sister. "I believe you're so conceited that you're proud even of being conceited. Why doesn't Guy come and see us, I wonder."

"Why should he come ?" Monica asked rather severely. "Perhaps he's doing some work for a change."

"I believe he's hurt," Pauline declared.

"Hurt ?" repeated her sisters.

"Yes, because you were both so frightfully critical of his room. Oh, I *am* glad that Mother and I aren't critical."

"Well, if he's hurt because I said he oughtn't to have an image of Our Lady on his mantelshelf," said Monica, "I really don't think we need bother any more about him. Was I to encourage him in such stupid little Gothic affectations ?"

"Oh, oh," cried Pauline. "I think he's frightened of

you, Monica dear, and of your long sentences, for I'm sure I am."

"He wasn't at all frightened of me," Monica asserted. "Didn't you hear him call me Monica?"

"And surely," Margaret put in, "you didn't really like those stupid mock mediaeval curtains. No design, just a lot of meaningless fleurs-de-lys looking like spots. It's because I think Guy has got a glimmering of taste that I gave him my honest opinion. Otherwise I shouldn't have bothered."

"No, I didn't like the curtains," Pauline admitted. "But I thought they were rather touching. And, oh, my dears, I can't tell you how touching I think the whole house is, with that poor woman squeezing her way about that enormous kitchen-furniture!"

Pauline looked out of the window as she spoke, and there at last was Guy standing on the lawn with her father, who was explaining something about a root which he held in his hand. On the two of them the rain poured steadily down. Pauline threw up the sash and called out that they were to come in at once.

"I am glad he's . . . why what's the matter, Margaret?" she asked, as she saw her sister looking at her with an expression of rather emphatic surprize.

"Really," commented Margaret. "I shouldn't have thought it was necessary to soothe his ruffled feelings by giving him the idea that you've been watching at the window all the week for his visit."

"Oh, Margaret, you are unkind," and, since words would all too soon have melted into tears, Pauline rushed from the nursery away to her own white fastness at the top of the house. She did not pause in her headlong flight to greet her mother in the passage; nor even when she entangled herself in Janet's apron could she say a word.

"Good gracious, Miss Pauline," gasped Janet. "And only just now the cat went and run between my legs in the hall."

Pauline's bedroom was immediately over the nursery; but so roundabout was the construction of the Rectory that, to reach the one from the other, all sorts of corridors and twisting stairways had to be passed; and when finally she flung herself down in her small armchair she was breathless. Soon, however, the tranquillity of the room restored her. The faded blue linen so cool to her cheeks quieted all the passionate indignation. On the wall Saint Ursula asleep in her bed seemed inconsistent with a proud rage; nor did Tobit laughing in the angel's company encourage her to sulk. Therefore almost before Guy had taken off his wet overcoat, Pauline had rushed downstairs again; had kissed Margaret; and had put three stitches in the tail of the scarlet bird that occupied her tambour-frame. Certainly when he came into the drawing-room she was as serene as her two sisters, and much more serene than Mrs. Grey, who had just discovered that she had carefully made the tea without a spoonful in the pot, besides mislaying a bottle of embrocation she had spent the afternoon in finding for an old parishioner's rheumatism.

Pauline, however, soon began to worry herself again because Guy was surely avoiding her most deliberately, and not merely avoiding her but paying a great deal of attention to Margaret. Of course she was glad for him to like Margaret, but Richard out in India must be considered. She could not forget that promise she had made to Richard last June, when they were paddling upstream into the sunset. Guy was charming; in a way she could be almost as fond of him as of Richard, but what would she say to Richard if she let Guy carry off Margaret? Besides, it was unkind not to have a word for her when she was always such a good listener to his tales of Miss Peasey, and when

they could always laugh together at the same absurdities of daily life. Perhaps he had felt that Margaret, who had been so critical over his curtains, must be propitiated—and yet now he was already going without a word to herself: he was shaking hands with her so formally that, though she longed to teaze him for wearing silk socks with those heavy brogues, she could not. He seemed to be angry with her . . . surely he was not angry because she had hailed him from the window.

"What was the matter with Guy?" she asked when he was gone, and when everybody looked at her sharply, Pauline felt herself on fire with blushes; made a wild stitch in the tail of the scarlet bird; and then rushed away to look for the lost embrocation, refusing to hear when they called after her that Mother had been sitting on it all the afternoon.

The windows along the corridors were inky blue, almost turning black, as she stared at them, half frightened in the unlighted dusk: outside, the noise of the rain was increasing every moment. She would sit up in her bedroom till dinner-time and write a long letter to India. By candlelight she wrote to Richard, seated at the small desk that was full of childish things.

WYCHFORD RECTORY
OXON.

Tuesday.

My dear Richard,

Thank you for your last letter which was very interesting. I should think your bridge was wonderful. Will you come back to England when it's finished? There is not much to tell you except that a man called Guy Hazlewood has taken Plashers Mead. He is very nice, or else I should have hated him to take the house you wanted. He is very tall—not so tall as father, of course—and he is a poet. He has a very nice bob-

tail and a touching housekeeper who is deaf. Birdwood likes him very much ; so I expect you would too. Birdwood wants to know if it's true that people in India—oh, bother, now I've forgotten what it was, only I know he's got a bet with Godbold's nephew about it. Guy—you mustn't be jealous that we call him Guy because he really is very nice—has just been in to tea. Margaret is a darling, but I wish you'd take my advice and write more about her *when you write. Of course I don't know what you do write, and I'm sure she really is interested in your bridge, but of course you must remember that she's not used to the kind of bridges you're building. But she's a darling and I'm simply longing for you to be married so that I can come and stay with you when I'm an old maid which I've quite made up my mind I'm going to be. Guy has been gardening with Father a good deal. Father says he's* fairly *intelligent. Isn't Father sweet? He drank your health at dinner the other night without anybody's reminding him it was your birthday. I think Guy likes Monica best. I don't think he cares at all for Margaret except of course he must admire her—Margaret is such a darling! Oh, a merry Christmas because it will be Christmas before you get this letter. Percy Brydone and Charlie Willsher came to dinner last month. They were so touching and bored.*

Lots of love from

Your loving

Pauline.

Don't forget about writing to Margaret more about herself.

Pauline put the letter in its crackling envelope with a sigh for the unformed hand in which it was written. Nothing brought home to her so nearly as this handwriting of hers the muddle she was always apt to make of things. How it sprawled across the page, so unlike Monica's that

was small and neat and exquisitely formed or Margaret's that was decorated with fantastic and beautiful affectations of manner. It was obvious, of course, that her sisters must always be the favourites of everybody, but it had been rather unkind of Guy to avoid her so obviously to-day. Richard had always realized that even if she were impulsive and foolish she was also tremendously sympathetic.

"For I really am sympathetic," she assured her image in the glass, as she tried to make the light brown hair look tidy enough to escape Margaret's remonstrances at dinner. If Guy were hopelessly in love with Margaret, how sympathetic she would be; and she would try to explain to him how interesting an unhappy love-affair always made people. For instance there was Miss Verney whom everybody thought was just a cross old maid; but if they had only seen, as she had seen, that cracked miniature, what romance even her cats would possess. She must take Guy to see Miss Verney or bring Miss Verney to see Guy: a meeting must somehow be arranged between these two, who would surely be drawn together by their misfortunes in love. Guy was exactly the person whom an unhappy love-affair would become. It would be so interesting in ten years' time, when she would be nearly thirty and old enough to be Guy's confidante without anybody's interference, to keep back the inquisitive world from Plashers Mead. No doubt by then Guy would be famous: he always spoke with such confidence of fame. Monica and Margaret would both be married, and she would still be living at the Rectory with her father and mother. Pauline, as she pictured the future, saw no change in them, but rather sacrificed to the ravages of time her own appearance and Guy's, so that at thirty she fancied both herself and him as already slightly grey. The gong sounded from the depths of the house, and hastily she snatched from her wardrobe the first frock she found: it happened to be a white one,

more suitable to June than to December, with a skirt of many flounces all stiffly starched. After rustling down passages and stairs she reached the dining-room just as the others were going into dinner.

"Pauline, how charming you look in that frock," her mother exclaimed. "Why it's like Summer just to see you."

Pauline was very happy that night because her mother and sisters petted her with the simple affection for which she was always longing.

The next day seemed fine enough to justify Mrs. Grey, Margaret and Monica in making an expedition into Oxford to see about Christmas presents; and in the afternoon, while Pauline was sitting alone in the nursery, Guy was shown in by Janet. Pauline felt very shy and blushful when she met him so intimately as this, after all her plans for him on the night before. He too seemed ill at ease, and she was sadly positive he missed Margaret. The sense of embarrassment lasted until tea-time, when Janet came in to say that the Rector hearing of Mr. Hazlewood's arrival had decided to have tea in the nursery.

"Oh, what fun," cried Pauline clapping her hands. "Janet, do give him the mug with 'A PRESENT FOR A GOOD BOY' on it."

"Dear me, Miss Pauline, what things you do think of, I do declare. Well, did you ever? Tut-tut! Fancy, for your father too!"

Nevertheless Janet sedately put the mug on the tray. When she was gone Pauline turned to Guy, and said:

"I'm sure Father thinks he ought to come and chaperone us. Isn't he sweet?"

Presently the Rector appeared looking very tall in the low doorway. He nodded cheerfully to Guy:

"Seen Vartani? You know, he's that pale blue fellow from Nazareth. Very often he's a washy lilac, but this is genuinely blue."

"No, I don't think I noticed it—him, I mean," said Guy apologetically.

"Oh, Father, of course he didn't! It's a tiny iris," she explained to Guy, "and Father puts in new roots every year. . . ."

"Bulbs, my dear, bulbs," corrected Mr. Grey. "It's one of the Histrio lot."

"Well, bulbs. And every year one flower comes out in the middle of the winter rain and lasts about ten minutes, and then all the summer Birdwood and Father grub about looking for the bulb, which they never find, and then Father gets six new ones."

They talked on, the three of them, about flowery subjects while the Rector drank his tea from the mug without a word of comment on the inscription. Then he went off to write a letter, and Guy with a regretful glance at the room supposed he ought to go.

"Oh, no, stay a little while," said Pauline. "Look, it's raining again."

It was only a shower through which the declining sun was lancing silver rays. As they watched it from the window without speaking, Pauline wondered if she ought to have given so frank an invitation to stay longer. Would Margaret have frowned? And how odd Guy was this afternoon. Why did he keep looking at her so intently as if about to speak, and then turn away with a sigh and nothing said.

"I do love this room," said Guy at last.

"I love it too," Pauline agreed.

"May I ask you something?"

"Yes, of course."

"You spoke to Margaret the other day about someone called Richard. Do you like him very much?"

"Yes, of course. Only you mustn't ask me about him. Please don't. I've promised Margaret I wouldn't talk about him. Please, please, don't ask me any more."

"But leaving Margaret out of it, do you like him . . . well . . . very much better than me, for instance?"

Guy used himself for comparison with such an assumption of carelessness as might give the impression that only by accident did he mention himself instead of the leg of the table, or the kitten.

"Oh, I couldn't tell you that. Because if I said I liked you even as much, I should feel disloyal to Richard, and he's the best friend I've got. Oh, do let's talk about something else. Please do, Mr. Hazlewood."

"Oh, look here, I'm going," exclaimed Guy, and he went instantly.

Pauline felt unhappy to think she had hurt his feelings; but he should not expect her to like him better than Richard. If Richard were married to Margaret, it might be different; but suppose that Margaret fell in love with Guy? Pauline felt her heart almost stop beating at the notion, and she made up her mind that if such a calamity befell it would be entirely her fault. The idea that she should so betray Richard's confidence made her miserable for the rest of the evening. Yet, though she was unhappy about Richard, it was always the picture of Guy hurrying from the nursery and his reproachful backward look that was visibly before her mind. And in the morning when she woke up, it was with a strange unsatisfactory feeling such as she had never known before. Yesterday came back to her remembrance with a great emptiness, seeming to her a day which had somehow never been properly finished. Here was the rain again raining, raining; and the old prospect of dreary weather that would not change for months.

A week went by without any sign of Guy. There were no amusing evenings now when he stayed to dinner: there were no delightful days of planting bulbs in the garden: there was nothing indeed to do, but visit bedridden old ladies to whom fine or bad weather no longer mattered.

Yet nobody else except herself seemed at all unhappy about it. Actually not one of the family commented upon Guy's absence.

"I really am afraid that Margaret *is* heartless," said Pauline to her image in the glass. "She doesn't seem to care a bit whether he is here or not."

Then suddenly the weather changed. The country sparkled with hoar frost, and everybody forgot about the rain, asking if ever before such weather had been known for Christmas. Guy was invited to dinner at the Rectory, and Pauline forgot about her problems in the pleasure that the jolly afternoon brought. Self-consciousness under the critical glances of Monica and Margaret vanished in the atmosphere of intimacy shed by the occasion. She could laugh and make a great noise without being reproved, and Guy himself was obviously more at home than he had ever been. There seemed a likelihood that now once again the progress of simple friendship would advance undisturbed by the complications of love, and Pauline was glad to be able to assure herself that Guy did not that afternoon display the slightest sign of a hopeless passion for Margaret. He was more in his mood and demeanour of last month, and diverted them greatly with an account of struggling to explain to Graves, the deaf and dumb gardener, what he wanted done in the garden.

"But didn't Birdwood help you?" they asked laughing.

"Well, Birdwood showed me what I ought to do," said Guy. "But it seemed such a rough method of information that I hadn't the heart to adopt it. You see, as far as I could make out, it consisted of pulling up a cabbage by the root, hitting Graves on the head with it, and then nodding violently. That meant 'clear away these cabbages.' Or if Birdwood wanted to say 'plant broccoli here,' he dug Graves in the ribs with the dibbler and rubbed his nose in the unthinned seedlings."

"What does Miss Peasey say?" asked Pauline who was in a state of the highest amusement, because deaf and dumb Graves was one of the villagers who lived under her particular patronage.

"Well, at first Miss Peasey was rather huffed, because she thought Graves was mocking her by pretending to be deaf. Now, however, she comes out and watches him at work and hopes that next Spring there'll be a little more variety in the garden."

The sunny sparkling weather lasted for a few days after Christmas; and one morning Pauline, walking by herself on Wychford down, met Guy.

"I wondered if I should see you," he said.

"Did you expect to see me, then?"

"Well, I knew you often came here, and this morning I couldn't resist coming here myself."

Pauline felt a sudden impulse to run away; and yet most unaccountably the impulse led her into walking along with Guy at a brisk pace over the close-cropped glittering turf. Round them trotted Bob in eddies of endless motion.

"Listen," said Guy. "I'm sure I heard a lark singing."

They stopped, and Pauline thought that never was there so sweet a silence as here upon the summit of this green down. Guy's lark could not be heard. There was not even the faint wind that sighs across high country. There was nothing but gorse and turf and a turquoise sky floating on silver deeps and distances above the winter landscape.

"When the gorse is out of bloom, kissing's out of fashion," he said, pointing to a golden spray.

Pauline had heard the jingle often enough, but spoken solemnly like this by Guy on Wychford down it flooded her cheeks with blushes, and in a sort of dear alarm the truth of it declared itself. She was startlingly aware of a new life, as it were demanding all sorts of questions of her. She felt a shyness that nearly drove her to run away from her com-

panion and yet at the same moment brought a complete incapacity for movement of any kind, an incapacity too that was full of rapture. She longed for him to say something of such convincing ordinariness as would break the spell and prove to her that she was still Pauline Grey ; while with all her desire for the spell to be broken, she was wondering if every moment she were not deliberately offering herself to enchantment.

"Have you ever felt," Guy was asking, "a long time after you've met somebody, as if you had suddenly met them again for the first time ? "

Pauline shook her head vaguely. Then with an effort she recaptured her old self and said laughing :

"But then, you see, I never think about anything."

"Sleeping beauty, sleeping beauty," said Guy.

And with an abrupt change of manner, he began to throw sticks for Bob, so that the lucid air was soon loud with continuous barking.

"I wonder if we shall ever meet again on Wychford down," said Guy as together they swung along the rolling highroad towards the village.

A horse and trap caught them up before Pauline could answer the speculation, and Mr. Godbold, as he passed, wished them both a very good morning.

"Godbold seems extraordinarily interested in us," Guy remarked, when for the third time before he turned the corner Mr. Godbold looked back at them.

"Oh, I wonder . . ." Pauline began, expressing with her lips sudden apprehension.

"You mean, he thought it strange to see us together ? "

"People in the country . . ." she began again.

"Why don't you hurry on alone ? " Guy asked. "And I'll come in to Wychford later."

"Don't be stupid. What do the Wychford people matter ? Besides I should hate to do anything like that."

She was half angry with Guy for the suggestion. It seemed to cast a shadow on the morning.

When Pauline got back home, she told them all about her meeting with Guy : nobody had a word of disapproval, not even Margaret, and the faint malaise of uncertainty vanished.

After tea, however, Mrs. Grey came in looking rather agitated.

" Pauline," she began at once. " You must not meet Guy alone like that again."

" Oh, darling Mother, you *are* looking so pink and flustered," said Pauline.

" No, there's nothing to laugh at. Nothing at all. I was most annoyed. Four of the people I visited actually had the impertinence to ask me if you and Guy were engaged."

Pauline went off into peals of laughter and danced about the room ; but when she was alone and thought again of what the gossips were saying, she suddenly realized it was not altogether for Richard's sake that she had dreaded the idea of Guy's falling in love with Margaret.

January

PLASHERS MEAD and the Rectory were not the only romantic houses in Wychford. Indeed the little town as a whole had preserved by reason of its remoteness from railways and important highroads the character given to it during the many years of prosperity which lasted until the reign of Charles the First. From that time it had slowly declined; and now with a stagnation that every year was more deeply accentuated by modern conditions it was still declining. New houses were never built, and even the King's Head, a pledge of commercial confidence in the Hanoverian succession, seemed to flaunt with an inappropriate modernity its red bricks mellowed by the passage of two centuries. Apart from this rival to the Stag Inn the fabric of Wychford was uniformly grey, to which, notwithstanding Miss Peasey's declaration of sameness, variety was amply secured by the character of the architecture. Gables and mullions; oaken eaves and corbels carefully ornamented; latticed oriels and sashed bows; roofs of steep unequal pitch to which age had often added strange undulations; chimney stacks of stone and gothic entries, all these gave variety enough; and if the whole effect was too sober for Miss Peasey's taste, the little town on the hillside was now safe for ever from the brightening of the dolls-house spirit.

Wychford could still be called a town, for it possessed a few side-streets, along the grassgrown cobbles of which there still existed many houses of considerable beauty and dignity. These had lapsed into a more apparent decay, because a dwindling population had avoided their direct

exposure to the bleak country and had left them empty. In the High Street this melancholy of bygone fame was less noticeable, and here scarcely a house was unoccupied. Some buildings, indeed, had been degraded to unworthy usages; and it was sad to see Perpendicular fireplaces filled with cheap lines in drapery, or to find an ancient chantry trodden by pigs and fowls. Generally, however, the High Street to the summit of its steep ascent had an air of sedate prosperity that did not reflect the reality of a slow depopulation.

About half way up the hill on the other side of the town from Plashers Mead and the Rectory was a side-street called Abbey Lane that, instead of leading to open country, was bounded by a high stone wall. This blocked the thoroughfare except so far as to allow a narrow path to skirt its base and give egress along some untidy cottage-gardens to a cross-road farther up the hill.

In the middle of the wall confronting the street two columns surmounted with huge round finials showed where there had once been a gate wide enough to admit a coach. Above the wall a belt of high trees obscured the view and gave a dank shadow to the road beneath. At one corner a small wooden wicket with a half obliterated proclamation of privacy enabled anyone to pass through the wall and enter the grounds of Wychford Abbey. This wicket opened directly on a path that wound through a plantation of yews interspersed with tall beeches and elms whose overarching tops intensified even in wintry leaflessness the prevalent gloom. The silence of this plantation made Wychford High Street seem in remembrance a noisy cheerful place, and the mere crackling of twigs and beech-mast induced the visitor to walk more quietly, fearful of profaning the mysteriousness even by so slight an indication of human presence. The plantation continued in tiers of trees down the hill to the Greenrush, which had been

deepened by a dam to support this gloom of overhanging branches with slow and solemn stream. The path, however, kept to the level ground and emerged presently upon a large square of pallescent grass the farther side of which was bounded by a deserted house.

There were no ruins of the ecclesiastical foundation to fret a gothic moonlight, but Wychford Abbey did not require these to justify the foreboding approach ; and the great Jacobean pile, whose stones the encroaching trees had robbed of warmth and vitality, brooded in the silence with a monstrous ghostliness that was scarcely heightened by the signs of material decay. Nevertheless the casements whose glass was filmy like the eyes of blind men or sometimes diced with sinister gaps ; the cracks and fissures in the external fabric ; the headless supporters of the family coat ; and the roof slowly being torn tile from tile by ivy, did consummate the initial impression. Within, the desolation was more marked. A few rotten planks had been nailed across the front door, but these had been kicked down by inquisitive explorers, and the hall remained perpetually open to the weather. In some of the rooms the floors had jagged pits, and there was not one which was not defiled by jackdaws, owls and bats. Strands of sickly ivy, which had forced an entrance through the windows, clawed the dusty air. A leprosy had infected the plaster ceilings so that the original splendour of their mouldings had become meaningless and scarcely any longer discernible ; and the marble of the florid mantelpieces was streaked with abominable damp. The back of the house seemed to go beyond the rest in the expression of utter abandonment. Crumbling walls with manes of ivy enclosed a series of gardens rank with docks and nettles and almost impenetrable on account of the matted briars. As if to add the final touch of melancholy the caretaker (for somewhere in the depths of the house existed ironically a caretaker) had

cultivated in this wilderness some dreary patches of potatoes. Beyond the forsaken parterres stretched a great unkempt shrubbery where laurels, peterswort and hollies struggled in disorderly and overgrown profusion for the pleasure of numberless birds, and where a wide path still maintained its slow diagonal down the hillside to the river's edge.

Such were the surroundings Guy chose to embower the doubts and hesitations that followed close upon the morning when on Wychford down he had been so nearly telling Pauline he loved her. Perhaps the almost savage gloom of this place helped to confirm his profound hopelessness. A black frost had succeeded the sparkle of Christmastide. The banks of the river in such weather were impossible, for the wind came biting across the water-meadows and piped in the withered reeds and rushes with an intolerable melancholy. Here in the grounds of Wychford Abbey there was comparative warmth, and the desolation suited the unfortunate end he was predicting for his hopes. To begin with, it was extremely improbable that Pauline cared about him. His assay with regard to Richard had not been encouraging, and his worst fears of being too late for real inclusion within the charm of the Rectory were surely justified. He had known all along how much exaggerated were his ambitions, and he wished now that in the first moment of their springing he had ruthlessly strangled them. Moreover, even if Pauline did ultimately come to care for him, how much farther was he advanced upon the road of a happy issue? It were presumptuous and absurd with only £150 a year to propose marriage, and if he gave up living here and became a schoolmaster at home, he knew that the post would be made conditional upon a willingness to wait as many years for marriage as the wisdom of age decreed. Besides, he could not take Pauline from Wychford and imprison her at Fox Hall to dose little boys with Gregory's Powder or check the schedule of their underclothing. The only justification for

taking Pauline away from the Rectory would be to make her immortal in poetry. Yet encouraging as lately one or two epithets had certainly been, he was still far from having written enough to fill even a very thin book; and really as he came to review the past three months he could not say that he had done much more or much better than in the days when Plashers Mead was undiscovered. Time had lately gone by very fast not merely on account of the jolly days at the Rectory, but also because weeks that were terminated by weekly bills seemed to be endowed with a double swiftness.

"I really must eat less meat," said Guy to himself. "It's ridiculous to spend eleven shillings and sixpence every week on meat . . . that's roughly £30 a year. Why, it's absurd. And I don't eat it. Bother Miss Peasey! What an appetite she has got."

He wondered if he could break through the barrier of his housekeeper's deafness so far as to impress upon her the fact that she ate too much meat. She spent too much, also, on small things like pepper and salt. This reckless buying of pepper and salt made the grocer's bill an eternal irritation, for it really seemed absurd to be spending all one's money on pepper and salt. Yet people did live on £150 a year. Coleridge had married with less than that and apparently had got on perfectly well, or would have if he had not been foolish in other ways. How on earth was it done? He really must try and find out how much for instance Birdwood spent every week on the necessities of life. That was the worst of Oxford . . . one came down without the slightest idea of the elementary facts of domestic economy. There had been a lot of soda bought last week. He remembered seeing it in one of those horrid little slippery tradesmen's books. Soda? What was it for? Vaguely Guy thought it was used to soften water, but there were plenty of rain tubs at Plashers Mead, and soda must be an un-

justifiable extravagance. Then Miss Peasey herself was getting £18 a year. It seemed very little, so little indeed that when he paid her every month, he felt inclined to apologize for the smallness of the amount, but little as it was it only left him with £132. Knock off £30 for meat and he had £102. £18 must go in rent and there was left £84. Then there was milk and bread and taxes and the subscription to the cricket-club and the subscription to all the other vice-presidencies to which the town had elected him. There was also Graves his deaf and dumb gardener, and a new bucket for the well. Books and clothes, of course, could be obtained on credit, but even so sometime or other bills came in. Guy made a number of mental calculations, but by no device was he able to make the amount required come to less than £82. That left £2 for Pauline, and then by the way there was the dog-licence which he had forgotten. Thirty-two and sixpence for Pauline! Guy roamed through the sad arbours of Wychford Abbey in the depths of depression, and watched with a cynical amusement the birds searching for grubs in the iron ground. He began to feel a positive sense of injury against love which had descended with proverbial wantonness to complicate mortal affairs. He tried to imagine the Rectory without Pauline, and when he did so all the attraction was gone. Yet distinctly when he had first met the Greys, he had not thought more often of Pauline than of her sisters. What perversity of circumstance had introduced love?

"It's being alone," said Guy. "I feed myself upon dreams. Michael was perfectly right. Wychford is a place of dreams."

He would cure this love-sickness. That was an idea for a sonnet. Damn! '*I attempt from love's sickness to fly.*' It need not be said again. At the same time, poem or not, he would avoid the Rectory and shut himself close in that green room which Margaret and Monica had thought so

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crude with undergraduate taste. If this cold went on, there would be skating; and he began to picture Pauline upon the ice. The vision flashed like a diamond through these gloomy groves, and with the soughing of the skates in his ears and the thought of Pauline's hands criss-cross in his own, Guy's first attack on love ended in complete surrender. Skating meant long talks with never a curious eye to cast dismay; and in long talks and rhythmic motion possibly she might come to love him. Guy's footsteps began to ring out upon the iron-bound walk, and of all the sad ghosts that should have haunted his path, there was not one who walked now beside him; for, as he dreamed upon the vision of Pauline, the melancholy of that forsaken place was lightened with a sort of April exultation and the promise of new life to gladden the once populous gardens where lovers might have been merry in the past.

However, when he was back in his house, Guy's earlier mood returned, and he made up his mind anew not to go to the Rectory. Nothing would do for him but the metaphysics and passion of Dr. John Donne; and on the dreary evening when the frost yielded to rain before there had been one day's skating, Guy was as near as anyone may ever have been to conversing with that old lover's ghost who died before the god of Love was born. All his plans wore mourning, and the bills that week rose two-and-sixpence-halfpenny higher than their highest total so far. Guy moped in his green library and, as he read through the manuscripts of poetry that with the progress of the night seemed to him worse and worse, he wished he could recapture some of that self-confidence which had carried him so serenely through Oxford; and he asked himself if Pauline's love would endow him once more with that conviction of ultimate fame, to the former safe tenure of which he now looked back as from a disillusioned old age.

Another week passed, and Guy wondered what they were

thinking of him at the Rectory for his neglect of all they might justly suppose had been offered him. Absence from Pauline did not seem to have effected much so far except a complete paralysis of his power to work with that diligence he had always preached as the true threshold of art. Perhaps he had been always a little too insistent upon the merit of academic industry, too conscious of a deliberate embarkation upon a well-built career, too careful of mere equipment in his exploration of Parnassus. So long as he had been exercizing his technical accomplishment, everything had seemed to be advancing securely toward the moment when inspiration should vitalize the promise of his craftsmanship. Now inspiration was at hand, and accomplishment had betrayed him. These effusions of restless love which he had lately produced were surely the most wretched cripples ever sent to climb the Heliconian slope. Guy looked at his notebook and marked how many apostrophes, the impulses to declaim which had seemed to scorch his imagination with bright ardours, had, alas, failed to kindle his uninflammable pencil. He derived a transient consolation from Browning's Pauline which was surely as inadequate as his own verse to celebrate the name. '*Pauline, mine own, bend o'er me.*' That opening half-line was the only one which moved him. But after all Browning did not esteem his own Pauline and had written it when he was twenty. Himself was twenty-two, and could not declare his passion in one lyric. A graceful sonnet for his father's birthday would not compensate for this dismaying failure. Moreover in rhymes, thought Guy, Pauline was no niggard; and with a flicker of sardonic humour he recalled how many Swinburne had found for Faustine.

It was Godbold who fed the vexations and torments of untried love with the bitterest medicine of all. He had come down to see Guy about an old chair that had to be fetched from a neighbouring village

and, when his business was over, seemed inclined to chat for a while.

"Have you ever noticed, Mr. Hazlewood," he began, "as there's a lot of people in this world who know more than a man knows himself?"

Guy indicated that the fact had struck him.

"Well, now, just because I happen to see you with Miss Pauline the other morning, there's half-a-dozen wise gabies in Wychford who've almost married you to her out of hand."

Guy tried not to look annoyed.

"Oh, you may well frown, Mr. Hazlewood, for as I said to them, it's nothing more than nonsense to tie up a young man and a young woman just because they happen to take a walk together on a fine morning."

"I hope this sort of intolerable gossip isn't still going on," said Guy savagely.

"Oh, well, you see, sir, Wychford is a middling place for gossip. And if it wasn't one of the Miss Greys it would be some other young Miss roundhereabouts. Human nature, like pigeons, is set on mating."

"I hope you'll contradict this ridiculous rumour," said Guy.

"Oh, I have done already. In fact I may say that one of my principles, Mr. Hazlewood, is to contradict everything. As I said to them, when they was talking about it in the post-office the other night, and that post-office is a rare place for gossip! Perhaps you've noticed that the nosiest man in a town always gets made postmaster? Where had I got to?—ah, yes, I said to them, 'You know a great lot about other people's business,' I said, 'but when I tell you that old Mrs. Mathers who lives in the last cottage but one in Rectory Lane says she's taken particular note as Mr. Hazlewood has never been near the Rectory for the last fortnight unless it was once when she heard footsteps and

hadn't time to get to the window to see who it was on account of the kettle being on the boil at that moment, where's your Holy Matrimony ? ' I said. With that up speaks Miss Burge from the back of the shop whose father used to keep the King's Head before he dropped dead of the apoplexy on Shipcot platform. ' That doesn't say he hasn't gone round by the field the same as Mr. Burrows's servant used to when she was being courted by We'll-mention-no-names.' ' No, and that he hasn't either,' said I smacking the counter, for I was feeling a bit angry by now at all this poking about in other people's business, ' that he hasn't,' I said, ' because the Rectory cook asked me most particular if there was anything the matter down at Plashers Mead seeing as Mr. Hazlewood hadn't been near the Rectory for a fortnight. That doesn't look like Holy Matrimony,' I said, and with that I walked out of the post-office. Mr. Hazlewood," Godbold concluded very earnestly, " the gossip of Wychford is something as no one would believe, if they hadn't heard it, as I have, every mortal day of my life."

Guy could have laughed on his own account, but the notion of Pauline's being dragged into the chatter made him furious. Yet what could he do ? If he went frequently to the Greys' house, he must be engaged according to Wychford. And if he did not go . . .

" I suppose they'll be saying next that the engagement has been broken off," he enquired with cold sarcasm.

" Oh, they have said it. Depend upon it, Mr. Hazlewood, it undoubtedly has been said."

It began to appeal to Guy as extremely undignified—the way in which he had let Godbold chatter on like this.

" I'm afraid I must be getting back to my work," he said curtly.

" That's right. Work's the best answer to talk. Did you feel it much here in that rainy spell ? "

"The meadows were a bit splashy of course, but the water never got anywhere near the house."

"But it will. Don't you make any mistake. It will. Only of course we've had a dry autumn. Why, last June year Miss Peasey could have been fishing for minnows in her kitchen. Now that seems a nice upstanding sort of woman. A Wesleen, they tell me? I haven't seen her in church that I can remember, and which would account for it. But I never talk to the chapel folk, they being that uncivilized. She's rather deaf, isn't she?"

"Yes, and therefore cannot gossip," Guy snapped.

"Well, I don't know," said Godbold doubtfully. "Some of the most unnatural scandals I ever heard were made by deaf women. Though that doesn't mean I'm saying Miss Peasey is a talker."

"I'm sure she isn't," Guy agreed. "Good-night, Mr. Godbold."

"Good-night, Mr. Hazlewood, don't you be discouraged by the gossip in Wychford. I always say, if you believe nothing you hear, next to nothing of what you read, and only half of what you see, no one can touch you. Good-night once more, sir. And don't you fret over what people say. I remember they once said I tried to work a horse which had the blind staggers, and Mrs. Godbold was that aggravated she went and washed a shirt of mine twice over, worrying herself. Good-night, Mr. Hazlewood."

This time the red-bearded carrier of Wychford (not an inappropriate profession for him) really departed, leaving Guy in a state of considerable resentment at the thought of the Wychford commentary.

That night the raw drizzle turned to snow; and when he looked out of his window next morning, it was lying thick over the country and was making his bedroom seem as grey as the loaded clouds above. That exhilaration of a new landscape which comes with snow drove away some of

Guy's depression, and after breakfast he went out, curious to contemplate its effect upon the Abbey. In the black frost the great pile had seemed to possess scarcely more substance than a shredded leaf; and when it lay sodden beneath the dripping trees, a manifest decay had made extinction infamous with the ooze of a rotting fungus. The weather now had brought a strange restoration to the abandoned house, and so completely had the covering of snow hidden most of the signs of dissolution that Wychford Abbey seemed no longer dead, but asleep in the quiet of a winter morning. The lawn in front stretched before it in decent whiteness, and the veiling of the ragged unhealthy grass took away from the front of the house that air of wan caducity, endowing the stones by contrast with tinted warmth and richness. The decrepit roof was hidden, and Wychford Abbey dreamed under its weight of snow with all the placid romance of a house on a Christmas card. The dark plantation was deprived of its gloom, and what was usually a kind of haunted stillness was now aspectful peace. Guy went over the crinching ground and strolled down the broad walk through the shrubbery. Everywhere the snow glistened with the footprints of many birds, but not a single call broke a silence which was cold and absolute except for the powdery whisper of the snow where it was sliding from the holly leaves.

When Guy reached the bottom of the shrubbery, he sat down on a fallen trunk by a backwater, which dried up here in the drift of dead leaves; and he watched the surface of it glazing perceptibly, yet not so fast but that the faint motion of the freezing air could write upon the smoothness a tremulous reticulation. He had not been resting long when he saw Margaret coming toward him down the walk, and with so light a tread that in her white coat she might have been a figment created for his fancy by the snow. He wondered if a sense of the added beauty her presence gave

the scene were in her mind. Probably it was, for Margaret had a discreet vanity that would never gratify itself so well as when she was alone; and plainly she must suppose herself alone, since here on this snowy morning she would not have expected to meet anybody. Guy thought it would be considerate to draw aside without spoiling her dream whatever the subject of the meditation. However, as he rose from the log to take the narrow path along the backwater and so turn homeward across the fields by the river, Margaret saw him and waved with a feathery gesture. As Guy went up the path to greet her, he was thinking how much her hair was like a dark leaf that had shaken off the snow, so easily might her blanched attire have fallen upon her from the clouds; then, as he came close, every charming fancy was suddenly spoilt by a remembrance of Wychford gossip, and he turned hastily round to see if there were prying glances in the laurels.

"What are you looking at?" she asked.

"A squirrel," said Guy quickly. He would not have had his absence from the Rectory ascribed to any fear of gossip; moreover, since a meeting with Margaret did not make his conscience the thrall of public opinion, he would not have her discreet vanity at all impaired. Therefore it was a squirrel he saw.

"We've been wondering what has become of you," she said.

"Well, I've been working rather hard; and as a matter of fact I was going to the Rectory this afternoon. Isn't the snow jolly after the rain? Especially here, don't you think?"

She nodded.

"I've got to go and visit an old woman who lives almost in Little Fairfield, and I thought I'd avoid as much as I could of the high road."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Guy, but in so doubtful

a voice that Margaret laughingly declared she was sure he was in a state of being offended with the Rectory.

"Oh, Margaret, don't be absurd. Offended?"

"Over the curtains?" she asked.

"Why if it wouldn't betray a gross insensibility to your opinion, I should tell you I thought no more about what you said. Besides, we've had reconciling Christmas since then."

"Ah, but you see, Pauline is always impressing on Monica and me our cruelty to you, and by this time Mother has been talked into believing in our hard and impenitent hearts."

"Pauline is . . ." Guy broke off and saw another squirrel. He could not trust himself to speak of Pauline, for in this stillness of snow he felt that the lightest remark would reveal his love; and there was in nature this morning a sort of suspense that seemed to rebuke unuttered secrets.

"Well, as you're walking with me to Fairfield—or nearly to Fairfield—your neglect of us shall be forgiven," Margaret promised. "Here we are out of the warm trees already. I'm glad I came this way, though I think it was rather foolish. Look how deep the snow seems on that field we've got to cross."

"It isn't really," said Guy, vaulting over the fence that ran round the confines of the Abbey wood.

"Ah, now you've spoilt it," she exclaimed. But Margaret did not pause a moment to regret the ruffling of that sheeted expanse and they walked on silently, watching the toes of their boots juggle with the snow.

"It generally is a pity," said Guy after a while.

"What?"

"Impressing one's existence on so lovely and inviolate a thing as this." He indicated the untrodden field in front of them.

"But look behind you," said Margaret. "Don't you think our footprints look very interesting?"

"Interesting, perhaps," Guy admitted. "Yet footprints in snow never seem to be going anywhere."

"Now I know quite well what you're doing," Margaret protested. "You're making that poor little wobbly track of ours try to bear all sorts of mysterious and symbolic intensities of meaning. Just because you're feeling annoyed with a sonnet, footprints in the snow mustn't lead anywhere. Why, Guy, if I told you what sentimental import my 'cello sometimes gives to a simple walk before lunch . . . I mean of course when I've been playing badly."

She sighed, and Guy wondered if the violoncello had been used with as little reference as a sonnet to the real cause of the mood.

"Why did you sigh just now?" he asked after another minute or two of silent progress.

"I wonder whether I'll tell you. No, I don't think I will. And yet . . ."

"And yet perhaps after all you will," said Guy eagerly. "And if you do, I'll tell you something in turn."

"That's no bribe," said Margaret laughing. "You foolish creature, don't you think I know what you'll tell me?"

Guy shook his head.

"I don't think you do. You may suspect. But for that matter, so may I. Isn't what you might have told me something that might most suitably be told on the way to Fairfield?"

"You've been talking about me to Pauline," said Margaret angrily.

"Never," he declared. "But you don't suppose you can have all these mysterious allusions to Richard without my guessing that his father is Vicar of Fairfield. Dear Margaret,

forgive me for guessing and tell me what you were going to tell."

"Have you heard I was engaged to Richard Ford?" she asked.

"I heard he was in love with you."

"Oh he is, he is," she murmured, and Guy thinking of Richard in India wondered if he ever dreamed of Margaret walking like this in a snowy England. The clock in Fairfield church struck eleven with an icy tinkle that on the muted air sounded very thinly. "But the problem for me," Margaret went on, "is whether I'm in love with him, or if Richard is merely the nicest person who has been in love with me so far."

"Well, if you'd asked me that three months ago," Guy said, "I would have answered decidedly that you weren't in love with him if you had one doubt. But now . . . well, you know really now I'm rather in the state of mind that wants everybody to be in love. And why do you think you're not in love with him?"

"I haven't really explained well," said Margaret. "What I'm sure of is that I'm not as much in love with him as I want to be in love."

"You're living opposite a looking-glass," said Guy. "That's what is the matter."

They had reached the stile leading over into the high road, and Margaret gazed back wistfully at the footprints in the snow, before they crossed it and went on their way.

"Yes," she said. "I am conceited. But my conceit is really cowardice. I long for admiration, and when I am admired I despise it. I lie in bed thinking how well I play the 'cello, and when I have the instrument by me I don't believe I can play even moderately well. I am really fond of him, but the moment I think that anybody else is thinking about my being fond of him I almost hate his name. I can't bear the idea of going to live in India and I detest

bridges—you know he builds bridges—and yet I couldn't possibly write to him and say that he must think no more about me. I'm really a mixture of Monica and Pauline, and so I'm not as happy as either of them."

"Yes, I suppose Pauline is very happy," said Guy in a depressed voice.

"What am I to do ?" Margaret asked.

"I'm sure you're much more in love than you think," he declared quickly, for he had the ghost of a temptation to tell her she was foolish to think any more of a love so uncertain as hers. There was enough jealousy of his standing at the Rectory to give him the impulse to rob Richard of his foothold, but the meanness destroyed itself on this virginal morning almost before Guy realized it had tried to exist. "Yes, I'm sure you're really in love," he repeated. "I think I can understand what you feel."

"Do you ?" said Margaret shaking her head a little sadly. "I'm afraid it's only a very willing sympathy on your part, for I'm sure I don't understand myself. That's why I'm conceited, perhaps. I'm trying to build up a Margaret Grey for other people to look at, which I admire like any pretty thing one makes oneself, and perhaps why I can't fall really in love is because I'm afraid of someone's understanding me and showing me to myself."

"You'd have to be very clever to disappoint that person," said Guy. "And why shouldn't Richard Ford be the one ?"

"Oh, he'll never discover me," said Margaret. "That's what's so dull."

"Aren't you a little unreasonable ?" Guy asked.

"Of course I am. Now don't let's talk about me any more : I'm really not worth discussing—only just because my family is so exquisite and because I adore them, I never talk about Richard to them. Here's the old woman's cottage. I shan't be more than a few minutes."

Guy felt honoured by Margaret's confidence, but his

heart was so full of Pauline that he transferred all the substance of what she had been saying to suit his own case. Would Pauline never know if she were in love ? Would he be doomed to the position of Richard ? Or worse, would Pauline fly from his love in terror of anything so disturbing to the perfection of her life at present ? On the whole he was inclined to think that this was exactly what she would do ; and he felt he would never have the courage to startle her with the question. When he thought of the girls to whom in the past of long vacations he had made protestations of devotion that were light as the thistledown in the summery meadows where they were uttered, it was incredible that the asking of Pauline should speed his heart like this. With other girls he had always imagined them slightly in love with him, but for Pauline to be in love with him seemed hopeless, though he qualified his humility by assuring himself that she could be in love with nobody. Did Margaret really have a suspicion that he was in love with Pauline ? If she had, why had she not drawn his confidence before she gave her own ? She came out from the cottage as he propounded this, and he told her, when their faces were set towards Wychford and a chilly wind that was rising, how he had been thinking about her confidence all the while she was in the cottage. Moreover, he was under the impression this was the truth.

"But don't think about me any more," she commanded.

"Never ?"

"Not until I speak first. Isn't it cold ? You must have been frozen waiting for me."

They hurried along talking mostly, though how the topic arose Guy never knew, about whether Alice in Wonderland were better than Alice Through the Looking-glass or not. The quotations that went to sustain the argument were so many that they arrived back very quickly, it seemed, at the stile leading into the snowy field.

" Will you go home the same way ? " Guy suggested. " Look, nobody has spoilt our tracks. They're jollier than ever, and do you see those rooks farther down the field ? It will snow again this afternoon and our footprints will vanish."

By the time they reached the Abbey wood Guy had made up his mind that as they walked up through the shrubbery, unless people were listening there, he would tell Margaret how deeply he was in love with Pauline. The resolution taken, his throat seemed to close up with nervousness, and vaulting over the fence he tripped and fell in a snow drift.

" Why this violent activity all of a sudden ? " Margaret asked.

He laughed gloomily and vowed it was the exhilarating weather. Up the broad walk they went slowly, and every yard was bringing them dreadfully nearer to Wychford High Street and the profanation of this snowy silence. Abruptly a robin began to sing from a bough almost overhead ; and, Guy realizing half-unconsciously that unless he told Margaret now, his words would die upon that robin's rathe melody, said :

" Margaret, you'll probably be angry, but I must tell you that I'm in love with your sister."

He drove his stick deep into the snow to give his eyes the excuse of looking down.

" With Pauline," she said softly.

He congratulated himself upon the cunning with which he had at least thrown something on Margaret of the responsibility, as he almost called it. Had she said Monica, it would have killed his hope at once.

" Of course I know it must sound ridiculous, but . . ."

" Is she in love with me ? " asked Margaret with tender mockery. " Well, I think she may be. Perhaps I'm almost sure she is."

" Margaret," said Guy seizing her hand. " I hope you'll

be the happiest person in the world always. You know, don't you, that I'm dying for you to be happy."

There may have been tears in her eyes as she responded with faintest pressure of her hand to his affection.

"And you won't forget all about me and take no more interest in what will seem my maddening indecision, when you and Pauline are happy?"

"My dear, as if I could," he exclaimed.

"Lovers can forget very easily," said Margaret. "You see I've thought such a lot about being in love that I've got everyone else's conduct clearly mapped out in my mind."

Guy stopped dead; and, as he stopped, the robin now far behind them ceased his song, and even the flute of the wind sounding on distant hollows and horizons cracked in the frost so that the stillness was sharp as ice itself.

"Margaret, what makes you think Pauline cares for me? How dare I be so fortunate?"

"Because you know you are fortunate," said Margaret, nor could falling snow have touched his arm more lightly than she. "Why do you suppose I told you about Richard if it was not because I thought you appreciated Pauline?"

"Ah, how I shall always love the snow," Guy exclaimed, grinding the slippery ball upon his heel to powder.

"But now I've got a disappointment for you," said Margaret. "Pauline and Monica are going into Oxford to-day for a week."

"You won't tell anybody what I've told you?" he begged.

"Of course not. Secrets are much too fascinating not to be kept as long as possible."

He opened the wicket, and presently they parted in the High Street.

"I shall come in this afternoon," he called after her. "Unless you're bored with me."

She invited him with her muff and seemed to float out of

sight. Suddenly Guy remembered that sometime this morning (it seemed as long ago as when Wychford Abbey was alive) Bob had been with him. He was glad of an excuse to go back and look for the dog in those now consecrated arbours. There the robin still sang his rathe pensive tune; and there from a high ash-bough a missel-thrush, wearing full ermine of the Spring, saluted the vestal day.

February

PAULINE started to Oxford with Monica, feeling rather disappointed she had not seen Guy before she went; for Margaret had come home with news of having walked with him to Fairfield, and it was tantalizing, indeed a little disturbing, to leave him behind with Margaret.

"Nothing is said to Margaret," Pauline protested at lunch, "when *she* goes out for a walk with Guy. Father, don't you think it's unfair?"

"Well, darling Pauline," interrupted Mrs. Grey with an anxious glance towards her second daughter. "You see, Margaret is in a way engaged."

"I'm not engaged," Margaret declared.

"But I'm asking Father," Pauline persisted. "Father, don't you think it's unfair?"

The Rector was turning over the pages of a seed-catalogue and answered Pauline's question with that engaging irrelevancy to which his family and parish were accustomed.

"It's disgraceful for these people to offer seeds of Incarvillea Olgae. My dears, you remember that anaemic magenta brute, the colour of a washed-out shirt? Ah," he sighed, "I wish they'd get that yellow Incarvillea over. I am tempted to fancy it might be as good as Tecoma Smithii, and of course coming from that Yang-tse-kiang country, it would be hardy."

"Francis dear!" Pauline cried. "Don't you think it's unfair?"

"Pauline," said her mother. "You must *not* call your father Francis in the dining-room."

The Rector oblivious of everything continued to turn slowly the pages of his catalogue.

"Oh, bother going to Oxford," said Monica looking out of the window to where Janet with frozen breath listened for the omnibus under gathering snow clouds.

"Now, really," Pauline exclaimed, diverted from her complaint of Margaret's behaviour by another injustice. "Isn't Monica too bad? She's grumbling, though it was she who made the plan to stay with the Strettons. And though they're her friends and not mine, I've been made to go too."

"Well, I hate staying with people," Monica explained.

"So do I," said Pauline. "And you accepted the invitation for me that day you were in Oxford buying Christmas presents, when you forgot to buy the patience-cards I wanted to give poor Miss Verney, so that I had to give her a horrid little china dog though she hates dogs."

"Now I'm sure it'll be charming, yes, charming, when you get there," Mrs. Grey affirmed hopefully.

"Oh, how glad I am I'm not going," said Margaret.

"I think you ought to go instead of me," Pauline told her.

"They're not my friends," Margaret replied with a shrug.

"No, but they're more your friends than mine," Pauline argued. "Because you're nearer to Monica. They're four years off being my friends and only two from being yours."

"Miss Monica," said Janet coming into the room. "The bus has come out from the King's Head yard, and you'll be late."

There was instantly a confusion of preparation by Mrs. Grey and Pauline, while Monica sighed at the trouble of departure and Margaret with exasperating indifference sat warm and triumphant by the fire.

"Good gracious," the Rector exclaimed, flinging the

catalogue down and speaking loud enough to be heard over the feverish search for Pauline's left glove. "These people have the impudence to advertize Penstemon Lobbii as a novelty when it's really our old friend Breviflorus. What on earth is to be done with these scoundrels?"

The horn of the omnibus sounded at the end of Rectory Lane; and the fat guard was marching through the snow with the girls' luggage. The good-byes were all said; and presently Pauline with her muff held close to her cheeks against the North wind was sitting on top of the omnibus that was toiling up the Shipcot road. As she caught sight of Plashers Mead etched upon the white scene, she wished she had left a message with Margaret to say in what deep disgrace Guy was. On they laboured across five miles of snow-stilled country with sparse flakes melting upon the horses' flanks and never a wayfarer between Wychford and Shipcot to pause and stare at them.

On the second night of their stay with the Strettons, Monica, when she and Pauline were going to bed, suddenly turned round from the dressing-table and demanded in rhetorical dismay why they had come.

"Never mind," said Pauline. "We've only got five more evenings."

"Well, that's nearly a week," Monica sighed. "And I'm tired to death of Olive already."

"But I'm much worse off," Pauline declared dolefully. "Because I have to sit next to the Professor, who does frighten me so. You see, he will include me in the conversation. Last night at dinner, after he'd been talking to that don from Balliol who knew Guy and whom I was dying to ask . . . to talk to myself, I mean, he turned round to me and said, 'I am afraid, Miss Pauline, that Aramaic roots are not very interesting to you.' Well, of course I got muddled between Aramaic and aromatic, and said that Father had just been given a lot which were very poisonous."

Monica laughed that sedate laugh of hers, which always seemed to Pauline like a clock striking, so independent was it of anybody's feelings.

"Monica darling, I don't want to be critical," said Pauline. "But you know sometimes your laugh sounds just a little—a very little self-satisfied."

"I think I am rather self-satisfied," Monica agreed, combing her golden hair away from her high pale forehead. "And Margaret is conceited, and you're twice as sweet as both of us put together."

"Oh, no I'm not, oh, no, no, Monica dearest, I'm not," Pauline contradicted hurriedly. "No, really I'm very horrid. And, you know, when I'm bored I'm sure I show it. Oh dear, I hope the Strettons didn't notice I was bored. Mrs. Stretton was so touching with the things they had brought back from Madeira, and I do hate things people bring back from places like Madeira."

"And when you're not bored with anybody," said Monica, "you're rather apt to make that too obvious also."

"Monica, why are you saying that?" Pauline asked with wide-open eyes.

"Even supposing Guy is in love with you," said Monica, slowly blowing out the candles on the dressing-table as she spoke, so that nothing was left but the rosy gas, "I don't think it's necessary to show him quite so clearly that you're in love with *him*."

"Monica!"

"Darling little sister, I do so want you . . . oh, how can I put it? Well, you know, when you break the time in a trio, as you sometimes do . . ."

"But I'm not in love with Guy," Pauline interrupted. "At least, oh, Monica, why do you choose a house like this to tell me such things?" she asked with tears and blushes fighting in her countenance.

"Pauline, it's only that I want you to keep in time."

"I can't possibly stay with the Strettons another five days," declared Pauline in deepest gloom. "You ought not to say things like that here."

She was looking round this strange bedroom for the comfort of familiar pictures, but there was nothing on these pink walls except a view of the Matterhorn. Monica was kneeling to say her prayers, and in the stillness the frost outside seemed to be pressing against the window-panes. Pauline thought it was rather unfair of Monica to fade like this into unearthly communications; and she knelt down to pray somewhat vagrant prayers into the quilted eiderdown that symbolized the guest-room's luxurious chill. She longed to look up in aspiration and behold Saint Ursula in that tall bed of hers or cheerful Tobit walking with his dog in the angel's company, and in the corner her own desk that was full of childish things. She rose from her knees at the same moment as Monica, who at once began to talk lightly of the tiresome people at dinner and seemed utterly unconscious of having wounded Pauline's thoughts. Yet when the room was dark, for a long while these wounded thoughts danced upon the wintry air that breathed of Wychford. '*Even supposing Guy is in love with you.*' It was curious that she could not feel very angry with Monica. '*Even supposing Guy is in love with you.*' It really seemed a pity to fall asleep: it was like falling asleep when music was being played.

The subject of Guy was not mentioned again, but during the days that remained of the visit, Pauline scarcely felt that she was living in the Strettons' house, and was so absent in her demeanour that Monica was disturbed into what was for her a positive sociableness to counteract Pauline's appearance of inattention. To consummate the vexation of the visit there came a sudden thaw two days before they left, and Oxford was ankle-deep in slush. Finally Pauline

and Monica were dragged through the very nadir of depression when on their last night they were taken out to dinner in trams and goloshes through such abominable conditions of weather.

" Fancy not ordering a cab," whispered Monica with cold disapproval.

" Perhaps they can't afford it," Pauline suggested.

" They can afford to go to Madeira," answered Monica, " and buy all those stupid knick-knacks."

" Well, Monica, they are your friends, you know," said Pauline.

However, the first of February arrived next morning, and Oxford was left behind. Pauline sighed with relief when they were seated in the train, and the twenty miles of country to Shipcot that generally seemed so dull were as green and welcome as if they were returning from a Siberian exile.

" You know, Monica, I really don't think we ought to stay with people. I don't think it's honest to spend such a hateful week as that in being pleasant," she declared.

" I didn't notice that you were taking much trouble to hide your boredom," said Monica. " It seems to me that I was always in a state of trying to steer people round your behaviour."

" Oh, but Professor Stretton loves me," said Pauline.

She was trying not to appear excited as the omnibus swished and slapped through the mud towards Wychford. She was determined that in future she would lead that enclosed and so serene life which she admired in her eldest sister. Nobody could criticize Monica except for her coldness, and Pauline knew that herself would never be able to be really as cold as that however much she might assume the effect.

" Grand weather after the snow," said the driver.

The roofs of Wychford were sparkling on the hillside,

and earth seemed to be turning restlessly in the slow winter sleep.

"This mud'll all be gone with a week of fine days like to-day," said the driver.

Plashers Mead was in sight now, but it was Monica who pointed to where Guy and his dog were wandering across the meadows that were so vividly emerald after the snow.

"I think it is," agreed Pauline indifferently.

In the Rectory garden a year might have passed, so great was the contrast between now and a week ago. Now the snowdrops were all that was left of the snow; and a treasure of aconites as bright as new guineas were scattered along the borders. Hatless and entranced the Rector was roaming from one cohort of green spears to another, each one of which would soon be flying the pennons of Spring. Pauline rushed to embrace him, and he without a word led her to see where on a sunny bank Greek anemones had opened their deep-blue stars.

"Blanda," he whispered. "And I've never known her so deep in colour. Dear me, poor old Ford tells me he hasn't got one left. I warned him she must have sun and drainage, but he would mix her with Nemorosa just to please his wife, which is ridiculous—particularly as they are never in bloom together."

He bent over and with two long fingers held up a flower full in the sun's eye, as he might have stooped to chuck under the chin a little girl of his parish.

Monica had brought back a new quartet, which they practised all that Candlemas Eve. When it was time to go to bed Mrs. Grey observed in a satisfied voice that after all it must have been charming at the Strettons.

"Oh, no, Mother, it was terribly dull," Pauline protested.

"Now, dear Pauline, how could it have been dull, when you've brought back this exquisite Schumann quartet?"

Margaret came to Pauline's room to say good-night, sat with her while she undressed and tucked her up so lovingly that Pauline was more than ever delighted to be back at home.

"Oh, Margaret, how sweet you are to me. Why? Is it because you really do miss me when I go away?"

"Partly," said Margaret.

"Why are you smiling so wisely? Have you put something under my pillow?" Pauline began to search.

"There's nothing under your pillow, except all the thoughts I have to-night for you."

Once more Margaret leaned over and kissed her, and Pauline faded into sleep upon the happiness of being at home again.

Next day after lunch her mother and sisters went to pay a long postponed call upon a new family in the neighbourhood, because Margaret insisted they must take advantage of this glorious weather which would surely not last very long.

Pauline spent the early afternoon with the Rector and Birdwood, writing labels while they sowed a lot of new sweet-peas which had been sent to the Rector for an opinion upon their merits. The clock was striking four when Guy strolled into the garden. Somehow Pauline's labels were not so carefully written after his arrival, and at last the Rector advised her to take Hazlewood and show him Anemone Blanda. They left the big wall-garden and went across the lawn in front of the house to the second wall-garden, where most of the Rector's favourites grew as it pleased them best.

"Oh, they've all gone to bed," said Pauline.

Guy knelt down and opened the petals of one.

"They're exactly the colour of your eyes," he said looking up at her.

Pauline was conscious that the simple statement was

fraught with a significance far greater than anything which had so far happened in her life. It was ringing in her ears like a bugle-call that sounded some far-flung advance, and involuntarily she drew back and began to talk nonsense breathlessly, while Guy did not speak. Nor must she let him speak, she told herself, for behind that simple comparison how many questions were trembling.

"Oh, I wonder if the others are back yet," she finally exclaimed, and forthwith hurried from the garden toward the house. She wished she must not look back over her shoulder to see Guy following her so gravely. Of course, when they were standing in the hall, the others had not come back; and the house in its silence was a hundred times more portentous than the garden. And what would Guy be thinking of her for bringing him back to this voicelessness in which she could not any longer talk nonsense? Here the least movement, the slightest gesture, the most ordinary word would be weighted for both of them with an importance that seemed unlimited. For the first time the Rectory was strangely frightening; and when through the silent passages they were walking toward the nursery, it was the exploration of a dream. Yet, however undiscoverable the object that was leading them, she was glad to see the nursery door, for there within would surely come back to her the ease of an immemorial familiarity. Yet in that room of childhood, that room the most bound up with the simple progress of her life, she found herself counting the birds, berries and daisies upon the walls, as if she were beholding them vaguely for the first time. Why was she unpicking Margaret's work or folding into this foolish elaboration of triangles Monica's music? And why did Guy behave so oddly, taking up all sorts of unnatural positions, leaning upon the rickety mantelshelf, balancing himself upon the fender, pleating the curtains and threading his way with long legs in and out, in and out of the chairs?

" Pauline ! "

He had stopped abruptly by the fireplace and was not looking at her when he spoke. Oh, he would never succeed in lifting even from the floor that match which with one foot he was trying to lift on to the other foot.

" Pauline ! "

Now he was looking at her ; and she must be looking at him, for there was nothing on this settee which would give her a good reason not to look at him. The room was so still that beyond the closed door the hoarse tick of the cuckoo-clock was audible ; and what was that behind her which was fretting against the window-pane ? And why was she holding with each hand to the brocade, as if she feared to be swept altogether out of this world ?

" Pauline ! "

Was it indeed her voice on earth that said ' yes ' ?

" Pauline, I suppose you know I love you ? "

And she was saying ' yes.'

" Pauline, do you love me ? "

And again she had said ' yes.'

Outside in the corridor the cuckoo snapped the half-hour : then it seemed to tick faster and a thousand times faster. She must turn away from Guy, and as she turned she saw that what had been fretting the window-pane was a spray of yellow jasmine. Upon the cheek that was turned from him the dipping sun shed a warm glow, but the one nearer was a flame of fire.

" Pauline ! "

He had knelt beside her in that moment ; and leaning over to his nearness, Pauline looked down at her hand in his, as if she were gazing at a flower which had been gathered.

SPRING

March

THE doubts and the joys of the future broke upon Guy with so wide and commingled a vision, that before the others got home and even before Janet came in with tea he hurried away from that nursery, where over the half-stilled echoes of childhood he had heard the sigh of Pauline's assent. The practical side of what he had done could be confronted to-morrow, and with a presage of hopelessness the word might have lain heavily upon his mind, if on the instant of sinking it had not been radiantly winged with the realization of the indestructible spirit that would henceforth animate all the to-morrows of time. No day could now droop for him, whatever the difficulties it brought, whatever the hazards, when he had Pauline and Pauline's heart : and like disregarded moments the years of their life went tumbling down into eternity, as the meaning of that sighed out assent broke upon his conscience with fresh glory.

"You'll tell your mother to-night ?" he asked. "I think Margaret will know when she sees your shining eyes."

"Are my eyes shining ?"

"Ah, don't you know they are, when you look into mine ?"

Guy could have proclaimed that he and she were stars flashing to one another across a stupendous night ; but there were no similes that did not seem tawdry when he threw them round Pauline.

"Child, child, beloved child," he whispered ; and his voice faltered for the pitiful inadequacy of anything that he could call her. What words existed, with whatever

tenderness uttered, with whatever passion consecrated by old lovers, that would not still be words, when they were used for Pauline ? Guy watched for a moment the cheek that was closer to his lips write in crimson the story of her love. He wished he could tell his love for her with even the hueless apograph of such a signal ; and yet, since anything he said was only worthy of utterance in so far as she by this ebb and flow of response made it worthy, why should he trouble that cheek which, sentient now as a rose of the sun, hushed all but wonder.

"Good-bye."

He bent over and touched her hand with his lips. Then the Rectory stairs had borne him down like a feather : the Rectory door had assumed a kind of humanity, so that the handle seemed to relinquish his grasp with an affectionate unwillingness. Out in the drive, where the purple trees were washed by the February dusk, he stood perplexed at himself because in a wild kiss he had not crushed Pauline to his heart. Had it been from some scruple of honour in case her father and mother should not countenance his love ? Had it sprung out of some impulse to postpone for a while a joy that must be the sharpest he would ever know ? Or was it that in the past he had often kissed too lightly so that now, when he really loved, he could not imagine the kiss unpassionate and fierce that would seal her immortally to love, yet leave her still a child ?

As he paused in that golden February dusk, Guy rejoiced he had told his love in such an awe of her girlhood ; and when from the nursery window Pauline blew one kiss and vanished like a fay at mortal trespassing, he floated homeward upon the airy salute, weighing no more than a seed of dandelion to his own sense of being. Upon his way he observed nothing, neither passer-by nor carts in the muddy roads. As he crossed the bridge, the roar of the water into the mill-pool was inaudible, nor did he hear his melodious

garden ways. And when Miss Peasey came to his room with the lamp, he could not realize for a moment who she was or what she was talking about. The hour or two before dinner went by as one tranced minute ; in a dream he went down to dinner ; in a dream he began to carve ; in a dream the knife remained motionless in the joint, so that Miss Peasey coming to enquire after his appetite thought it was stuck in a skewer. Upstairs in the library again, he dreamed the evening away ; and when the lamp hummed slowly and oilily to extinction he still sat on, till at last the fire perished and from complete darkness he roused himself and went to bed.

Guy was under the cloud of a reaction when he rang the Rectory bell on the morning after. The door looked less amicable, and the dragon-headed knocker stared balefully while he was waiting to be let in. He wondered for whom of the family he ought to ask, but Mrs. Grey came nervously into the hall and invited him into the drawing-room.

" Pauline has gone over to Fairfield," she began in jerky sentences. " Charming . . . yes, charming, you came this morning."

The sun had not yet reached the oriel of the drawing-room, that with shadows and fragrance was welcoming Guy where he sat in a winged armchair beside the fire. Time was seeming to celebrate the momentousness of his visit by standing still as in a picture, and he knew that every word and every gesture of Mrs. Grey would in his memory rest always enambered. He was glad, and yet in the captivating quiet a little sorry, that she began to speak at once :

" Of course Pauline told me about yesterday. And of course I would sooner she were in love with a man she loved than with a man who had a great deal of money. But of course you mustn't be engaged at once. At least you can be engaged ; you are engaged. Oh, yes, of course, if you weren't engaged, I shouldn't allow you to see each other,

and you shall see each other occasionally. Francis has not said anything. The Rector will probably be rather doubtful. Of course I told him; only he happened to be very busy about something in the garden. But he would want Pauline to be happy. Of course she is my favourite—at least I should not say that. I love all my daughters, but Pauline is—well, she has the most beautiful nature in the world. My darling Pauline!"

Mrs. Grey's eyes were wet, and Guy was so full of affectionate gratitude that it was only by blinking very hard at a small picture of Pauline hanging beside the mantelpiece he was able to keep his own dry.

"I have a nicer picture than that, which I will give you," Mrs. Grey promised. "The one that I am fondest of, the one I keep beside my bed. Perhaps you would like a picture of her when she was seventeen? She's just the same now, and really I think she'll always be the same."

"You are too good to me, Mrs. Grey," he sighed.

"We are all so fond of you . . . even the Rector, though he is not likely to show it. Pauline is perhaps more like me. Her impulsiveness comes from me."

"Ought I to talk to the Rector about our engagement?" Guy asked.

"Oh, no, no . . . it would disturb him, and I don't think he'll admit that you *are* engaged. In fact he said something about children: but I would rather . . . at least, of course, you are children. But Margaret says you can't be quite a child or you would not be in love with Pauline. And now if you go along the Fairfield road, you'll meet her. But that is only an exception. Not often. I think to-day she might be disappointed if you didn't meet her. And come to lunch, of course. Poetry is a little precarious, but at any rate for the present we needn't talk about the future. I wish your mother were still alive. I think she would have loved Pauline."

"She would have adored her," said Guy fervently.

"And your father? Of course you'll bring him to tea, when he comes to stay with you. That will be charming . . . yes, charming. Now hurry, or you'll miss her."

Guy had no words to tell Mrs. Grey of the devotion she had inspired; but all the way down the Fairfield road he blessed her and hoped that somehow the benediction would make itself manifest. Then, far away, coming over the brow of a hill he saw Pauline. It was one of those hills with a suggestion of the sea behind them, so sharply are they cut against the sky. This was one of those hills that in childhood had thrilled him with promise of the faintly imaginable; and even now he always approached such a hill with a dream and surmise of new beauty. Yet more wonderful than any dream was the reality of Pauline coming towards him over the glistening road. She was shy when he met her, and the answers she gave to his eager questions were so softly spoken that Guy was half afraid of having exacted too much from her yesterday. Did she regret already the untroublous time before she knew him? Yet it was better that she should walk beside him in still unbroken enchantment, that the declaration of his love should not have damaged the wings seeming always unfolded for flight from earth: so would he wish to keep her always, that never this Psyche should be made a prisoner by him. The elusive quality of Pauline which was shared in a slighter degree by her sisters kept him eternally breathless, for she was immaterial as a cloud that flushes for an instant far away from the sunset. And yet she was made with too much of earth's simple beauty to be compared with clouds. Her sisters had the ghostly serenity and remoteness that might more appropriately be called elusive. Pauline gave more the effect of an earthly thing that transcends by the perfection of its substance even spirit; and rather was she seeming, though poised for airy regions, still sweetly content with earth.

She had not been more elusive than eglantine overarching a deep lane at Midsummer, for he had pulled down the spray, and it was the fear of a petal falling too soon from the tremulous flowers that gave him this sense of awe as he walked beside her.

Yet once again Guy found his comparisons poor enough when he looked at Pauline, and he exclaimed despairingly:

"There *are* no words for you. I wanted to say to your mother what I thought about you. Oh, she was so charming."

"She is a darling," said Pauline. "And so is Father."

They were come to the stile where he and Margaret had watched their footprints on the snow.

"And Margaret was very sympathetic, you know," he went on. "Really, if it hadn't been for her, I should never have dared to tell you I loved you. We talked about her and Richard. . . ."

"Margaret does love him. She does," Pauline declared. "Only she will ask herself questions all the time."

How she changed when she was speaking of Richard, thought Guy a little jealously. Why could she not say out clearly like that her love for him?

"You do love me this morning?" he asked. She was standing on the step of the stile, and he offered his hand to help her down. "Won't you say 'I love you'?"

But only with her eyes could she tell him, and as, her finger-tips on his, she jumped from the step, she was imponderable as the blush upon her cheeks.

"In the summer," said Guy, "you and I will be on the river together. Will you be shy when Summer comes?"

"Monica says I'm not nearly shy enough."

"What on earth does Monica expect?"

They were under the trees of Wychford Abbey, and Guy told her of the days he had spent here, thinking of her and of the hopelessness of her loving him.

"I could not imagine you would love me. Why do you ?"

She shook her head.

"One day we'll explore the inside of the house together, shall we ?"

"Oh, no, I hate that place. Oh, no, Guy, we'll never go there. Come quickly, I hate that house. Margaret loves it and says I'm morbid to be afraid. But I shudder when I see it."

They hurried through the dark plantation; and Guy under the influence of Pauline's positive terror felt strangely as if, were he to look behind, he would behold the house leering at them sardonically.

People too eyed them, as they went down High Street and turned into Rectory Lane. Guy had a sensation of all the inhabitants hurrying from their business in the depths of their old houses to peer through the casements at Pauline and him; and he was glad when they reached the Rectory drive and escaped the silent commentary.

When she was at home again Pauline's spirits rose amazingly; and all through lunch she was so excited, that her mother and sisters were continually repressing her noisiness. Guy on the contrary felt woefully self-conscious and was wondering all the while with how deep a dislike the Rector was regarding him and if after lunch he would not call him aside and solemnly expel him from the house. As they got up from the table, the Rector asked if Guy were doing anything particular that afternoon and on receiving an assurance that he was not, the Rector asked if he would help with the sweet-peas that still wanted sorting. Guy in a bodeful gloom said he would be delighted.

"I shall be in the garden at two," said the Rector.

"Shall I come as well and help ?" Pauline offered.

"No, I want you to take some things into the town for me," said the Rector.

Guy's heart sank at this confirmation of his fears. Out in the hall Margaret took him aside.

"Well, are you happy?"

"Margaret, you've been beyond words good to me."

"Always be happy," she said.

Even Monica whispered to him that he was lucky, and Guy was so deeply impressed at being whispered to by Monica that it gave him a little courage for his interview. He joined the Rector in the garden punctually at two, and worked hard with labels and classifications.

"*A7*," the Rector read out. "*A lavender twice as big as Lady Grizel Hamilton. D21. An orange that will not burn.* Humph! I don't believe it. Do you believe that, Birdwood?"

The gardener shook his head.

"There never was an orange as didn't burn like a house on fire the moment the sun set eyes on it."

"Of course it'll burn, and anyhow there's no such thing as an orange sweet-pea. If there is, it's Henry Eckford."

"Henry isn't orange," said Birdwood. "Leastways not an orange like you get at Christmas."

"More buff?"

"Buff as he can be," said Birdwood. "What do you think, Mr. Hazlenut?" he went on, turning to Guy and winking very hard.

"I really don't know him . . . it . . ." said Guy.

"*O5*," the Rector began again. "*A cream and rose picotee Spenser.* Yes, I daresay," he commented. "And with about as much smell as distilled water."

So the business went on, with Guy on tenterhooks all the while for his own summing-up by the Rector. He thought the moment was arrived when Birdwood was sent off on an errand and when the Rector getting up from his kneeler began to shake the trowel at him impressively. But all he said was:

"Tingitana's plumping up magnificently. And we'll have some flowers in three weeks—the first I shall have had since the Diamond Jubilee. Sun! Sun!"

Guy jumped at the apostrophe, so nearly did it approximate to 'son-in-law.' But of this relation nothing was said, and now Pauline was calling out that tea was ready.

"Go in, my dear fellow," said the Rector. "I've still a few things to do in the garden. By the way was your father at Trinity, Oxford?"

"No, he was at Exeter."

"Ah, then, I didn't know him. I knew a Hazlewood at Trinity."

The Rector turned away to business elsewhere, and Guy was left to puzzle over his casual allusion. Perhaps he ought to have raised the subject of being in love with Pauline, for which purpose the Rector may have given him an opening. Or did this enquiry about his father portend a letter to him from the Rector about his son's prospects? He certainly ought to have said something to make the Rector realize how much tact would be necessary in approaching his father. Pauline called again from the nursery window, and Guy hurried off to join the rest of the family at tea.

In the drawing-room Mrs. Grey, Monica and Margaret all seemed anxious to show their pleasure in Pauline's happiness; and Guy in the assurance this old house gave him of a smooth course for his love ceased to worry any longer about parental problems and was content to live in the merry and intimate present. He realized how far he was advanced in his relation to the family when Brydone, the doctor's son, came in to call. Guy took a malicious delight in his stilted talk, as for half-an-hour he tried to explain to Monica, a grave and abstracted listener, how the pike would in March go up the ditches and the shallow backwaters and what great sport it was to snare them with a copper noose suspended from a long pole.

There was, too, that triumphant moment he had long desired, when Brydone, rising to take his leave, asked if Guy were coming and when he was able to reply casually that he was not coming just yet.

After tea Guy and Pauline, as if by an impulse that occurred to both of them simultaneously, begged Margaret to come and talk in the nursery. She seemed pleased that they wanted her; and the three of them spent the time till dinner in looking at the old familiar things of childhood; at photographs of Monica and Margaret and Pauline in short frocks; at tattered volumes scrawled in by the fingers of little girls.

"I wish I'd known you when you were small," sighed Guy. "How wasted all these years seem."

The gong went suddenly, and Margaret said that of course to-night he would stay to dinner.

So once again he was staying to dinner and now on such terms as would make this an occasion difficult to forget. As he waited alone in the lamplit nursery, while Margaret and Pauline were dressing, he kissed Pauline in each faded picture stuck in those gay scrap-books of Varese. Nor did he feel the least ashamed of himself, although at Oxford his cynicism had been the admiration even of Balliol, where there had been no one like him for tearing sentiment into dishonoured rags. When the Rector came in to dinner, carrying with him a dusty botanical folio that swept all the glass and silver from his end of the table to huddle in the centre, Guy tried to make out if he were very much depressed by his not having yet gone home.

"Dear me," said the Rector. "I was sure I had seen it in here."

"Seen what, Francis?" asked his wife.

"A plant you wouldn't know. A Cilician crocus."

"Isn't Father sweet?" said Pauline. "Because of course Mother never knows any plant."

"What nonsense, Pauline. Of course I know a crocus."

Toward the end of dinner Mrs. Grey said rather nervously:

"Francis dear, wouldn't you like to drink Pauline's health?"

"Why, with pleasure," said the Rector. "Though she looks very well."

Pauline jumped in her chair with delight at this, but Mrs. Grey waved her into silence and said:

"And Guy's health too?"

The Rector courteously saluted him; but the guest feared there was an undernote of irony in the bow.

After dinner when Monica, Margaret and Pauline were preparing for a trio, Mrs. Grey said confidentially to Guy:

"You mustn't expect Francis—the Rector to realize at once that you and Pauline are engaged. And of course it isn't exactly an engagement yet. You mustn't see her too often. You're both so young. Indeed, as Francis said, children really."

Then the trio began, and Guy in the tall Caroline chair lived every note that Pauline played on her violin, demanding of himself what he had done to deserve her love. He looked round once at Mrs. Grey in the other chair, and marked her beating time while like his own her thoughts were all for Pauline. In the heart of that music Guy was able to say anything and he could not resist leaning over and whispering to Mrs. Grey:

"I adore her."

"So do I," said the mother, breaking not a bar in her beat and gazing with soft eyes at that beloved player.

When the music stopped, Guy felt a little embarrassed by the remembrance of his unreserved avowal; yet evidently it had seemed natural to Mrs. Grey, for when he was saying good-bye in the hall, she whispered to Pauline that she

could walk with Guy a short way along the drive. His heart leapt to the knowledge that here at last was the final sanction of his love for her. Pauline flung round her shoulders that white frieze coat in which he had first beheld her under the moon, misty, autumnal, a dream within a dream; and now they were actually walking together. He touched her arm half-timidly, as if even so light a gesture could destroy this moment.

"Pauline, Pauline!"

He saw her clear eyes in the February starshine and folding her close he kissed her mouth. When he woke, he was at home; and for hours he sat entranced, knowing that never again for as long as he lived would he feel upon his lips as now the freshness of Pauline's first kiss.

The rest of that February went by with lengthening eves that died on the dusky riot of blackbirds in the rhododendrons. Here and there in mossy corners primroses were come too soon, seeming all aghast and wan to behold themselves out of the cloistral earth, while the buds of the daffodils were still upright and would not hang their heads till driven by the wooing of the windy March sun.

The grey-eyed virginal month, that is of no season and must as often bear the malice of Winter's retreat as the ruffianly onset of Spring, had now that very seriousness which suited Guy's troth.

Rules had been made with which neither he nor Pauline were discontented, and so through all that February Guy went twice a week to the Rectory and counted himself rich in Mrs. Grey's promise that he and Pauline should sometimes be allowed, when the season was full-fledged, to go for walks together. At present, however, the Rectory garden must be a territory large enough for their love.

These first encounters were endowed with perhaps not much more than the excitement of what were in a way

superficial observations, since neither of them was yet attempting to sound any deeps in the other's character. Guy was engaged with driving a wedge into that past of the Rectory whose least events he now envied, and he was never tired of the talks about Pauline's childhood, so much of a fairy-tale she still seemed and fit for endless repetition. And if Guy was never tired of being told, her family was never tired of telling. Never, he thought, was lover so fortunate in an audience as he in the willingness with which he was accorded a confirmation of all his praises. Sometimes, indeed, he had to look reproachfully at Monica or Margaret when Pauline seemed hurt at being checked for some piece of demonstrativeness. If he did so, the sisters would always take an opportunity to draw him aside and explain that it was only Pauline's perfection which made them so anxious for its security. Indeed they guarded her perpetually and with such a high sense of the privilege of wardship that Guy always had to forgive them at once. Moreover, he was so conscious of their magnanimity in considering him as a lover that he was almost afraid to claim his right.

"Margaret," he said one day. "I don't know how you can bear to contemplate Pauline married. Why, when I think of myself, I'm simply dumb before the—what word is there—audacity is much too pale and, oh, what word is there?"

"I don't think I could contemplate her married to anybody but you," said Margaret.

"But why me?"

"Why, because you are young enough to make love beautiful and right," Margaret told him. "And yet you seem old enough to realize Pauline's exquisite nature. So that one isn't afraid of her being squandered for a young man's experience."

"But I'm not rich," said Guy, deliberately leading Mar-

garet on to discuss for the hundredth time this topic of himself and Pauline.

"Pauline wouldn't be happy with riches. They would oppress her. She isn't luxurious like me."

So round and round, backward and forward, on and on the debate would go, until Margaret had arranged for Guy and Pauline a life so idyllic that Shelley would scarcely have found a flaw in her conception.

Pauline, however demonstrative in the presence of her family, was still shy when she was alone with her lover. Her mirth was turned to a whisper, and her greatest eloquence was a speech of drooping silences and of blushes rising and falling. Guy never tired of watching these flowery motions that were the response of her cheeks to his love. Each word he murmured was a wind to stir her countenance or ruffle her eyes, so that they too responded with cloudy deeps and shadows and sudden veilings.

Nothing more was mentioned of the practical side of the engagement, for Mrs. Grey, Monica and Margaret were all too delightfully enthralled with the progress of an idyll that was to each of them her own secret poem of Pauline in love; while as for the Rector he remained outwardly oblivious of the whole matter.

March came crashing into this peace without disturbing the simple pattern into which the existence of Guy and Pauline had now resolved itself—a pattern, moreover, that belonged to Pauline's mother and sisters for their own pleasure in embroidery, so that the lovers were, as it might be, carried about from room to room. Sometimes indeed, when Guy came to the Rectory, there was a pretence of leaving him and Pauline alone; but mostly they were in the company of the others, and Guy was now as deep in the family life as if he were a son of the house. Since he and Pauline never went for walks together, perhaps Wychford speculation had died down—at any rate there was no

gossip to disturb Mrs. Grey ; although, as she had by now given up the theory of a sort of engagement, yet without consenting to anything in the shape of a final announcement, it might not have mattered much.

Meanwhile, it began to dawn on Guy that the time was coming when he would have to make up his mind to do something definite, and on these bleak mornings of early March, as he watched the scanty snowflakes withering against the panes, he asked himself if there was any justification for staying on at Plashers Mead in the new circumstances of his life there. At night, however, when the wind piped and whistled round the house, he used to dream upon the firelight and shrink from the idea of abandoning all that Plashers Mead had stood for and all that now still more it must stand for in the future. If only a plan could be devised by which the house were secured against sacrilege ; and half-fantastically he began to imagine a monastic academy for poets, of which he would be Warden. Perhaps Michael Fane would like this idea, and since he had money he might come forward with an offer of endowment. Then he and Pauline could be married ; for £150 a year would be an ample income, if there were no rent to pay and no wages. He of course would earn his living as superintendent of the academic discipline ; and really, as he dreamed over his plan, such an establishment would be an admirable corollary to Oxford. It might gain even a sort of official recognition from the University. Plainly some sort of institution was wanted where in these commercial days young writers could retreat to learn their craft less suicidally than by journalism. What should he call his academy ? With marriage as the reason for inventing this economy he could hardly give it too monastic a complexion. The louder the wind beat against the house, the more feasibly in the lamplit quiet within did the scheme present itself ; and Michael Fane, who was always searching for an object in life, would

be the very person to involve in the materialization. He would say nothing to anybody else; not even would he mention the idea to Pauline herself. These sanguine dreams occupied his evenings prosperously enough, while March swept past with searing winds from Muscovy that skimmed the rich earth of the ploughlands with a dusty pallor, tarnished the daffodils and seemed to crack the very bird-song. Guy, however, with every day either a day nearer to seeing Pauline again or the day itself, did not care about the wind that blew, and he was as happy walking on the uplands as the spindleshanked hares that sported among the turfy mounds.

Later, the shrilling wind from the East surrendered to the booming of the equinox. Louder than before the weather beat against Guy's house from the opposite quarter. Chimneys groaned like broken horns, and after a desperate gale even deaf Miss Peasey complained that she had heard the wind once or twice in the night and that her bedroom had seemed a bit draughty. Guy discovered that several tiles had been blown from the roof, so that through the lath and plaster above her head there was a sound of demoniac fife-playing. Then the wind dropped: the rain poured down: but at last on Lady Day morning Guy woke up to see a rich sky between white magnificent clouds, a gentle breeze, and a letter from his father.

Fox Hall,
Galton,
Hants.

March 24.

Dear Guy,

I send you this with the third instalment of the £150. *Please let me have a prompter acknowledgement than last time when, I remember, you kept me waiting nearly three weeks. I*

am glad to have news of successful experiments in verse-making, but I should be much more glad to hear that you had made up your mind to make them as an accessory to a regular profession. You will notice that I do not attempt to influence your choice in this matter, and so I hope you will not retort with invidious comparisons between literature and the teaching of small boys.

No, I do not remember a man called Grey in my time at Oxford, but I do remember a man of the same name as ours at Trinity. He came to grief, I believe, later on. You must assure your friend that this was not myself. I am glad you find the Rector and his wife such pleasant people. Have they any children? I wish I could say as much for the new Vicar of Galton, who is a pompous nincompoop and has introduced a lot of this High Church frippery which so annoys some of the parents. Your friend is lucky to be able to afford so much leisure for gardening. I am of course far too busy to think about anything like that except in the summer holidays, when flowers would scarcely give me the change of air I want. This year I hope to come and see you for a week or two, and we shall be able to discuss the future. Don't work too hard and please oblige me by acknowledging the enclosed cheque.

Your affectionate father

John Hazlewood.

Guy went out in the orchard to meditate upon the advisableness of telling his father at once about Pauline. If he were coming to stay here next August, he ought to know beforehand, for it would be horrid to have the atmosphere of Plashers Mead ruined by acrimonious argument. August, however, was still a long way off, and now there was going to be fine weather for a while, which must not be spoilt. Besides, perhaps in the end his father would not come, and anyway himself would be having to decide presently upon a more definite step. He would tell Pauline,

when he saw her to-morrow, that he ought to go up to London and get some journalistic work so as to bring the time of their marriage nearer. Or should he wait until he had sounded Michael about that academy? Plashers Mead enlarged itself for Guy's vision until the orchard was a quadrangle framed with grey cloisters, along which Parnassian aspirants walked in meditation. Would any of them be married except himself and Pauline? On the whole he decided that they would not, though of course, if Michael were to find the capital he must be allowed to marry. How the Balliol people would laugh at these fantastic plans, thought Guy, and he stopped for a moment from the architectonics of his academy to laugh at himself. Certainly it would be better not to publish his plans even to Pauline until they showed a hint of conceivable maturity. Guy fell back into the comfort of spacious dreams, wandering up and down the orchard; and round about him the starlings pranked in metallic plumage of green and bronze quarrelled over the holes in the apple-trees they coveted for their nests.

Suddenly Guy heard his name called and looking up he saw across the mill-stream Margaret and Pauline standing in the churchyard.

"We've been to church," said Pauline. "And a dead bat fell down nearly on to Father's head when he was giving the Blessing. So he and the sacristan have gone up in the tower to see what can be done about it."

"Shall I come and help?" Guy suggested.

"You won't be able to do any more than they will," said Margaret laughing. "But if you want to come and help, you'd better. Hasn't your canoe arrived yet?"

Guy shook his head.

"It's such a glorious morning that I could almost swim the river," he declared.

"Oh, Margaret, don't let him," Pauline exclaimed.

Guy said he would be in the churchyard before they were back in Rectory Lane to meet him, and with Bob barking at his heels he ran at full speed through the orchard, through the garden, over the bridge and down Rectory Lane just as the two girls reached the lych-gate. They all went into the big church, even Bob, though he slunk at their heels as modestly as might the Devil. High up over the chancel they could see the Rector and the shiny-pated sacristan leaning from the windows of the bell-ringers' chamber and scratching with wands at some blind arches where bats might most improbably lurk.

"Let's go to the top of the tower," Guy proposed.

"Father isn't on the top of the tower," said Margaret. "But you go up with Pauline. I'll wait for you."

So Guy and Pauline went through a low door beaked by Normans centuries ago, and climbed the stone stairs until they reached the bell-ringers' chamber where they paused to greet the Rector, who waved a vague arm in greeting. The stairs grew more narrow and musty as they went higher; but all the way at intervals there were deep slits in the walls, framing thin pictures of the outspread country below the tower. Still up they went past the bell-ropes, past the great bells themselves that hung like a cluster of mighty fruit, until finally they came out through a small turret to meet the March sky. The spire, that rose as high again as they had already come, occupied nearly all the space and left only a yard of leaded roof on which to walk; but even so, up here where the breeze blew strongly, they seemed to stand in the very course of the clouds with the world at their feet. Northward they looked across the brown mill-stream; across Guy's green orchard; across the flashing tributary beyond; across the meadows, to where the Shipcot road climbed the side of the wold. Westward they looked to Plashers Mead and Miss Peasey flapping a table-cloth; to Guy's mazy garden and the grey

wall under the limes; and farther to the tree-tops of Wychford Abbey; to the twining waters of the valley and the rounded hills. Southward they looked to Wychford town in tier on tier of shining roofs; and above the translucent smoke to where the telegraph-poles of the long highway went rocketing into Gloucestershire. And lastly Eastward they looked through a flight of snowy pigeons to the Rectory asleep in gardens that already were painted with the simple flowers of Spring.

Guy took Pauline's hand where it rested on the parapet.

"Dearest, Spring is here," he said. "And this is our world that you and I are looking at to-day."

April

PAULINE in the happiness which had come to her lately had forgotten Miss Verney; and when one morning she met that solitary spinster, whose pale and watery eyes were uttering such reproach, she promised impulsively to come to tea that very afternoon and bring with her a friend.

"You've certainly quite deserted me lately," said Miss Verney in that wavering falsetto of hers through which the echoes maybe of a once admired soprano could still be distinctly heard.

"Oh, but I've been so busy, Miss Verney."

"Yes, I daresay. Well, I used to be busy once myself. Here's lovely weather for the first of April. Quite a treat to be out of doors. Now, don't make an April fool of your poor old Miss Verney by forgetting to come this afternoon. Who's the friend you are anxious to bring?"

"Mr. Hazlewood. He's living at Plashers Mead, you know."

"Dear me, a gentleman? Then he won't enjoy coming to see me."

"But he will, Miss Verney, because he writes poetry, and you know you told me once that you used to write poetry."

"Ah, well, dear me, that's a secret I should never have let out. Well, good-bye, my dear, and pray don't forget to come, for I shall be having cakes, you know."

Miss Verney, whose unhappy love-affair in a dim past had been Pauline's cherished secret since the afternoon of her seventeenth birthday, bowed with much dignity; and Pauline, lest she should offend her again, had to turn round

several times to smile and wave farewells before Miss Verney disappeared into the confectioner's shop.

When she got home, Pauline asked her mother if she thought it mattered taking Guy to tea with Miss Verney.

"Because, of course, she's sure to guess that we're engaged."

"But, my dear child, you're not really engaged, at least not publicly. You must remember that."

"But I could tell Miss Verney as a great secret. And I know she won't tell anyone because once she told me a great secret about herself. Besides, she's gone to buy cakes for tea, and if I don't take Guy she'll be so dreadfully disappointed."

"Why can't you take Guy without saying anything about being engaged?" asked Mrs. Grey.

"Oh, because Miss Verney is so frightfully sharp, especially in matters of love. I think you don't like her much, Mother darling, but really, you know, she *is* sympathetic."

Mrs. Grey looked hopelessly round for advice, but as neither Margaret nor Monica were in the room, she had to give way to Pauline's entreaty, and the leave was granted.

When Guy arrived at the Rectory about three o'clock, he seemed delighted at the notion of going out to tea with Pauline, though he looked a little doubtfully at the others, as if he wondered at the permission's being accorded. However, they set out in an atmosphere of good-will, and Pauline was happy to have him beside her walking up Wychford High Street. Miss Verney's house was at the very top of the hill, which meant that the eyes of the whole population had to be encountered before they reached it. They could see Miss Verney watching for them, as they walked across the slip of grass that with white posts and a festoon of white chains warded off general traffic. The moment they reached the gate, her head vanished from the window; and

they had scarcely rung the bell, when the maid had opened the door. And they were scarcely inside the hall, when Miss Verney came grandly out of the drawing-room (which was not the front room) to greet them.

"How d'ye do? How d'ye do? Miss Grey will have told you that I rarely have visitors. And therefore this is a great pleasure."

Pauline threw sparkling blue glances at Guy for the Miss Grey, while they followed her into the drawing-room full of cats and ornaments. The cats all marched round Guy in a sort of solemn quadrille, so that what with the embarrassment they caused to his legs and the difficulty that the rest of him found with the ornaments, Pauline really had to lead him safely to a chair.

"Have you been long in Wychford, Mr. Hazlewood?" enquired Miss Verney. "I fear you'll find the valley very damp. We who live at the top of the hill consider the air up here so much more bracing. But then, you see, my father was a sailor."

So the conversation progressed, conversation that was cut as thinly and nicely as the lozenges of bread and butter, fragments of which on various parts of the rug the cats were eating with that apparent difficulty cats always find in mastication.

"I sadly spoil my pets," said Miss Verney. "For really, you see, they are my best friends, as I always say to people who look surprized at my indulgence of them. . . . Would you mind telling Bellerophon he's left a piece of butter just by your foot, that you might otherwise tread into the carpet. You'll forgive my fussiness, but then, you see, my father was a sailor."

Pauline was longing to know what Miss Verney thought of Guy, and presently when tea was over she suggested that he should be shown the garden, the green oblong of which looked so inviting from the low windows.

"Dear me, the garden," said Miss Verney. "Rather early in the year, don't you think, for the garden? My shoes. For though my father was a sailor, I do not, alas, inherit his constitution. I really think, Pauline, we must wait for the garden. But perhaps Mr. Hazlewood would care . . ."

"Guy, you must see the garden," Pauline declared.

So Guy rose and, having listened to Miss Verney's instructions about the key in the garden-door, went out followed by several cats. A moment later they saw him still with two cats in attendance bending with an appearance of profound interest over the narrow flower-beds that fringed the grass.

"I declare that Pegasus and dear Bellerophon have taken quite a fancy to him. Most remarkable and gratifying," said Miss Verney, watching from the window through which the western sun flaming upon her thin hair kindled a few golden strands from the ashes that seemed before entirely to have quenched them.

"Miss Verney, can you keep a secret?" asked Pauline breathlessly.

"My dear, you forget my father was a sailor," replied Miss Verney supporting with each arm a martial elbow.

"He and I are engaged," Pauline whispered through a blush.

"Pauline, you amaze me," the old maid exclaimed. "My dear child, I hope you'll let me wish you happiness." She came to Pauline and kissed with cold lips her cheek. "You have always been so kind and considerate to me. Yes, I am sure, without irreverence I can say you have been to me as welcome as the sun. I pray that you will always be happy. Ah, the dear fellow," exclaimed Miss Verney, looking with the utmost affection to where Guy was now completing the circuit of her borders. "The dear fellow, how droll he must have thought it when I referred to you as Miss Grey. Though to this flinging about of Christian names without

regard for the sacredness of real intimacy, which is so common nowadays, I shall never submit."

Miss Verney tapped upon the window to summon Guy within again. When he was back in the drawing-room, she fluttered toward him and took his hand.

"My dear Mr. Hazlewood, for my father having been a sailor I must always be rather blunter than most people, I have to congratulate you. This dear child! My greatest friend in Wychford, and indeed really, so scattered now are all the people I have known, I might almost say, my greatest friend anywhere! You are a most enviable young man. But the secret is safe with me. No one shall know."

"I had to tell Miss Verney," Pauline explained.

"I'm delighted for Miss Verney to know," said Guy. "I only wish the time were come when everybody could know."

Miss Verney was in a state of the greatest excitement, and made so many references to her nautical paternity that Pauline half expected her to hitch up her skirt and dance a triumphant hornpipe in the middle of the cats' slow waltzing.

"This dear child," Miss Verney went on, clasping rapturous hands. "I have known her since she was twelve. The dearest little thing! I really wish you had known her; you would have fallen in love with her then, I do declare." And Miss Verney laughed in a high treble at her joke. "Lately I have been rather worried because I had an idea I was being deserted. But now I understand the reason. Oh, the secret is perfectly safe. In me you have a true sympathizer. Pauline will tell you that with the people she loves, there is no one so sympathetic as I am." Suddenly Miss Verney stopped and looked very suspicious. "You're not making an April fool of me?" she asked.

"Miss Verney!" Pauline gasped. "How could you think I would joke about love?"

The old maid's forehead cleared.

"Of course you wouldn't, my dear, but really this morning I have been so pestered by some of the boys ringing the bell and saying my chimney is on fire that . . . ah, but, I am ashamed of myself. You must forgive me, Pauline. And is it not the thing to drink the health of lovers? There is a bottle of sherry, I feel sure. I brought several bottles that were left from my father's cellar, when I first came to Wychford eight years ago, and they have not all been drunk yet."

She rang the bell, and when the maid came in said:

"Mabel, if you take my keys and open the store-cupboard, you will find some bottles of wine on the top shelf. Pray open one, and having carefully decanted it, bring it as carefully in with three glasses on the silver tray."

Mabel naturally looked very much astonished at this order, and while she was gone Miss Verney thought one after another of all the reasons that Mabel could possibly ascribe to her request for wine.

"But she will never guess the real one," said Miss Verney.

The wine was brought in and poured out. Miss Verney coughed a great deal over her glass, and two small pink spots appeared on her cheeks.

"I am sure," she said, "that when my dear father brought this wine back from Portugal, he would have been happy to know that some of it would be drunk to the health of two young people in love. For he was, if I may say so without impropriety, a great lady's man."

Pauline and Guy drank Miss Verney's health in turn and thanked her for the good omens she had wished for their love.

"My dear Pauline," said Miss Verney. "Do you think? I wonder if I dare. You know what I mean? Do you think I could show it to Mr. Hazlewood?"

"Do you mean the miniature?" whispered Pauline.

Miss Verney nodded.

"Oh, do, Miss Verney, do! Guy would so appreciate it," Pauline declared.

The old maid went to her bureau and from a small locked drawer took out a leather case which she handed to Guy.

"The spring is broken. It opens very easily," she said in a gentle voice.

Pauline forgot her shyness of Guy and leant over his shoulder, while he looked at the picture of a young man rosy with that too blooming youth which miniatures always portray.

"We were engaged to be married," said Miss Verney. "But circumstances alter cases; and we were never married."

Pauline looked down at Guy with tears in her eyes and felt miserable to be so happy when poor Miss Verney had been so sad.

"Thank you very much for showing me that," said Guy.

Soon it was time to say good-bye to Miss Verney and, having made many promises to come quickly again, they left her and went down the steep High Street, where in many of the windows of the houses there were hyacinths and on the old walls plum-trees in bloom.

"Pauline," said Guy. "Let's go for a walk to-morrow morning and see if the gorse is in bloom on Wychford down. There are so many things I want to tell you."

"Do you think Mother will let us?"

"If we can go to tea with Miss Verney," said Guy, "we shall be able to go for a walk. And I never see you alone in the Rectory."

"I'll ask Mother," said Pauline.

"You want to come?"

"Of course. Of course."

"You see," said Guy. "It's one of the places where I

nearly told you I loved you. And it wouldn't be fair not to tell you there, as soon as I can."

In the Rectory everybody was anxious to know how Guy liked Pauline's Miss Verney.

"Margaret, you are really unkind to laugh at her," protested Pauline. "Guy understands, if you don't, how frightfully sympathetic she is. She is one of the people who really understands about being in love."

Margaret laughed.

"Don't I ?" she said.

"No, indeed, Margaret, sometimes I don't think you do," said Pauline.

"Nor I ?" asked Monica.

"You don't at all !" Pauline declared.

"Well, if it means being like Miss Verney, I hope I never shall," said Monica.

"Now, children, children," interrupted Mrs. Grey. "You must not be cross with one another."

"Well, Mother, Margaret and Monica are not to laugh at Miss Verney," Pauline insisted. "And to-morrow Guy and I want as a great exception to go for a walk to Wychford down. May we ?"

"Well, as a great exception, yes," said Mrs. Grey ; and Guy with apparently an access of grateful industry said he must go home and work.

Pauline wondered what Guy would have to tell her to-morrow, and she fell asleep that night, hoping she would not be shy to-morrow ; for, since Guy was still no more to Pauline than the personification of a vague and happy love just as Miss Verney's miniature was the personification of one that was not happy, she always was a little alarmed when the personification became real.

Wychford down seemed to rest on billowy clouds next morning, so light was Pauline's heart, so light was the earth on which she walked ; and when Guy kissed her the larks in

their blue world were not far away, so near did she soar upon his kiss to the rays of their glittering plumes.

"Every time I see you," said Guy, "the world seems to offer itself to us more completely. I never kissed you before under the sky like this."

She wished he would not say the actual word, for it made her realize herself in his arms, and brought back in a flood all her shyness.

"I think it's dry enough to sit on this stone," said Guy.

So they sat on one of the outcrops of Wychford freestone that all around were thrusting themselves up from the grass like old grey animals.

"Now tell me more about Miss Verney," he went on. "Why was her love-affair unhappy?"

"Oh, she never told me much," said Pauline.

"You and I haven't very long," said Guy. "Love travels by so fast. You and I mustn't have secrets."

"I haven't any secrets," said Pauline. "I had one about Richard, but you know about him. And that was Margaret's secret really. Why do you say that, Guy?"

"I was thinking of myself," he answered. "I was thinking how little you know about me—really not much more than you know of Miss Verney's miniature."

"Guy, how strange," she said. "Last night I thought that."

Then he began to talk in halting sentences, turned away from her all the time and digging his stick deep down in the turf, while Bob looked on with anxious curiosity for what these excavations would produce.

"Pauline, I so adore you that it clouds everything to realize that before I loved you, I should have had love-affairs with other girls. Of course they meant nothing, but now they make me miserable. Shall I tell you about them or shall I . . . can I blot them for ever out of my mind?"

"Oh, don't tell me about them, don't tell me about

them," Pauline murmured in a low hurried voice. She felt that if Guy said another word she would run from him in a wild terror that would never let her rest, that would urge her out over the down's edge in desperate descent.

"I don't want to tell you about them," said Guy. "But, they've stood so at the back of my thoughts whenever I have been with you; and yesterday at Miss Verney's, I had a sense of guilt as if I were responsible in some way for her unhappiness. I had to tell you, Pauline."

She sat silent under the song of the larks that in streams of melodious light poured through their wings.

"Why do you say nothing?" he asked.

"Oh, don't let's talk about it any more. Promise me never to talk about it. Oh, Guy, why 'of course'? Why 'of course'?"

"Of course?" he repeated.

"'Of course they meant nothing.' That seems so dreadful to me. Perhaps you won't understand."

"Dear Pauline, isn't that 'of course' the reason they torment me?" he said. "It isn't kind of you to assume anything else."

She forgave him in that instant; and before she knew what she had done had put her hand impulsively on his. To the Pauline who made that gesture he was no more the unapproachable lover but someone whom she had wounded involuntarily.

"My heart of hearts, my adored Pauline."

With a sigh she faded to him: with a sigh the dog sat down by his master's neglected stick: with a sigh the April wind stole through the thickets of gorse and out over the down. And always more and more dauntlessly the larks flung before them their fountainous notes to pierce those blue spaces that burned between the clouds. No more was said of the past that morning, and with April come they were happy sitting up there, although, as Guy said, such weather

could hardly be expected to last. And since this walk was a great exception to the rule of their life, they were back at the Rectory very punctually, so that by propitiating everybody with good behaviour they might soon demand another exception.

That night there recurred to Pauline when she was in her room a sudden memory of what Guy had said to her about girls with whom he had had love-affairs; and with the stark forms of shadows they made a procession across her walls in the candlelight. She wished now she had let Guy tell her more, so that she could give distinguishing lineaments of humanity to each of these maddening figures. What were they like and why, taken unaware, was she set on fire with rage to know them? For a long while Pauline tossed sleeplessly on that bed to which usually morning came so soon; and even when the candle was put out, she seemed to feel these forms of Guy's confession all about her. To-morrow she must see him again; she could no longer bear to think of him alone. These shapes that from his past vaguely jeered at her were to him endowed, each, with what memories. Oh, she could cry out with exasperation even in this silent house where she had lived so long unvexed.

"What is happening to me? What is happening to me?" asked Pauline, as the darkness drew nearer to her. "Why doesn't Margaret come?"

She jumped out of bed and ran trembling to her sister's room.

"Pauline, what is it?" asked Margaret starting up.

"I'm frightened, Margaret. I'm frightened. My room seemed full of people."

"You goose. What people?"

"Oh, Margaret, I do love you."

She kissed her sister passionately; and Margaret, who was usually so lazy, got out of bed and came back with her to her room; where she read aloud Alice in Wonderland,

sitting by the bed with her dark hair fallen about her slim shoulders.

In the morning the impression of the night's alarm remained sharply enough with Pauline to make her anxious to see Guy, without waiting for the ordained interval to which they should submit; and all that day, when he did not come, for the first time she felt definitely the clamorous and persistent desire for his company, the absence of which the old perfection of her home was no longer able to counteract. For the first time in her life the Rectory had a sort of emptiness; and there was not a room on this tediously beautiful day, nor any nook in the garden, which could calm her with the familiar assurance of home. When the time for music came round, that night, it seemed to Pauline not at all worth while to play quartets in celebration of a day that had been so barren of events.

"Don't you want to play?" they asked her in surprize.

"Why should we play?" she countered. "But I'll listen to you, if you like."

Of course she was persuaded into taking her part, and never had she been so often out of tune and never had her strings snapped so continuously. Always until to-night the performance of music had brought to her the peaceful irresponsibleness of being herself in a pattern: now this sense of design was irritating her with an arduous repression, until at last she put down her violin and refused to play any more. Pauline felt that the others knew the cause of her ill-temper, but none of them said anything about Guy and, with her for audience in one of the Caroline chairs, they played trios instead.

Next day when Guy did come, it was wet; and Pauline wished Margaret would leave them together, so that they could talk: but Margaret stayed all the afternoon in the nursery, and Pauline made up her mind that somehow she must go for another walk with Guy.

She found her mother alone in the drawing-room before dinner.

"Mother, don't you think, Guy and I might go for a walk to-morrow ?"

"Oh, Pauline, you only went for a walk together the day before yesterday. And you really must remember you're not engaged. The Wychford people will gossip so, and that will make your father angry."

"Well, why can't we be engaged openly ?"

"No, not yet. Now, please don't ask me. Pauline, I beg you will say no more about it."

"Then I can go to-morrow," said Pauline. "Oh, Mother, you are so sweet to me."

Mrs. Grey looked rather perplexed and as if she were vainly trying to determine what she had said to make Pauline suppose that leave for walks had been given. However, she evidently supposed it had; and when next Guy came to the Rectory, Pauline whispered to him they could go for a walk if they did not have to go through Wychford. She could not understand herself when she found it so difficult to tell Guy this delightful news, for it was she who had managed it; and yet here she was blushing in the revelation.

The fact that Wychford was out of bounds really made their walk more magical, for Pauline and Guy went past the lily-pond and the lawn in front of the house and slipped through the little wicket in the high grey wall, as it were, in the very eye of the nursery-window. They dallied for a while in the paddock, peering for fritillary buds; then they crossed the rickety bridge to the water-meadows, a territory not spied upon, silver-rosed with lady-smocks. To-day they would visit the peninsula where under the moon they first had met.

Pauline, as they walked over the meads, no longer had the desire to ask Guy more about his tale of old loves. His

presence beside her had rested her fears; and she made up her mind that the disquiet of the other evening had been mere fatigue after the excitement of the day. This secluded world from which they were now approaching the even greater seclusion of their peninsula gave itself all to her and Guy.

"How often have I been here without you," said Guy. "How often have I wished you were beside me, and now you are beside me."

They were standing in a wreath of snowy blackthorn, that almost veiled even the narrow entrance to this demesne they held in fief of April.

"What did you think about me that night we met?" Guy asked.

And for perhaps the hundredth time she whispered how she had liked him very much.

"Why don't you ask me what I thought about you?"

"What did you?" she whispered again.

"I went to sleep thinking of you," he said. "I did not know your name. I loved you then, I think. Pauline, when next September comes, we'll pick mushrooms together, shall we? And I shall never gather any mushrooms, because I shall always be gathering your hands. And the September afterward. Pauline! Shall we be married? Pauline Hazlewood! Say that."

She shook her head.

"Whisper it."

But she could not, and yet in her heart the foolish names were singing together.

"How can I leave you?" Guy demanded.

"Leave me?" she echoed.

"I ought. I ought. You see, if I don't, I shall never persuade my father that we must be married next year. I must go to London and show that I'm in earnest."

"But when will you go?" said Pauline in deep dismay.

"Is your voice sad?" he asked. "Pauline, don't you want me to go?"

"Of course I don't," she replied, turning up to his a face so miserable that he held her to him and vowed he would not go.

"My dearest, I only thought it was my duty, but if you will believe in me, then let me stay in Wychford. After all, you are young. I am young. Why, you won't be twenty till May morning. And I shan't be twenty-three till next August. Even if we wait three years to be married, we shall be always together, and it won't seem so long."

So with her arm in his Pauline walked on through the lady-smocks, thinking that never had anyone a lover so wonderful as this long-legged lover beside her.

Holy Week was at hand, and in the variety of functions that Monica insisted her father should hold and her family attend Pauline saw little of Guy, although he came very often to church, sitting as stiff and awkward, she thought, as a brass knight on a tomb. However, it pleased her greatly Guy should come to church, since it pleased her family. Yet that was least of all the true reason, and Pauline used to send the angels that came to visit her down through the church to visit Guy; her simple faith glowed with richer illumination when she thought of him in church, and while her mother and Monica tried to pull the Wychford choir through the notation of Solesmes, and while Margaret knelt apart in carved abstraction, Pauline prayed that Guy would all his life wish to keep Holy Week with her like this.

Pauline hurried through a shower to church on Easter Morning, and shook mingled tears and raindrops from herself when she saw that Guy was come to Communion. So then that angel had travelled from her bedside last night to hover over Guy and bid him wake early next morning, because it was Easter Day. With never so holy a

calm had she knelt in the jewelled shadows of that chancel or retired from the altar to find her pew imparadised. When the people came out of church the sun was shining, and on the trees and on the tombstones a multitude of birds were singing. Never had Pauline felt the spirit of Eastertide uplift her with such a joy, joy for her lover beside her, joy for Summer close at hand, joy for all the joy that Easter could bring to the soul.

There were Easter eggs at breakfast dyed yellow, blue and purple. There were new white trumpet daffodils for the Rector to gaze at. There was satisfaction for Monica in having defeated for ever Anglican chants, and for Margaret a letter from Richard, though, to be sure, she did not seem so glad of this as Pauline would have wished. There was all that happy scene and a new quartet for her mother; and for Guy and herself there was a long walk this afternoon to wherever they wanted to go.

At the beginning of the week Monica and Margaret went away on a visit, to which they set out with the usual lamentations now redoubled because they suddenly realized it was universal holiday time. With her two eldest daughters away from the Rectory, Mrs. Grey was no match for Pauline; so she and Guy had a week of freedom, wandering over the country where they willed.

Wychford down saw them, and the water-meadows of the western valley. The road to Fairfield knew their footsteps, and they even went to tea with Mr. and Mrs. Ford, who talked of Richard out in India and bemoaned the inferiority of their garden to the Rector's. They wandered by treeless roads that led to the hills, and to the grassy solitudes that seemed made to be walked over hand in hand. Once they went as far as the forest of Wych, a wild woodland that lay remote from any village and where along the glades myriads of primroses stared at them. Yet, though that day had seemed to Pauline almost more delicately fair than any of

their days, it ended dismally with April in black misfeature, and before they reached home they were wet through.

By ill luck her mother met her just as she was hurrying up to her room.

"Pauline," she said with a good deal of agitation. "I must forbid these walks with Guy every day. Wet to the skin! Oh dear, how careless of him to take you so far. You must be reasonable and unselfish. It's so difficult for me. Father asked where you were this afternoon, and I had to pretend to be deaf. He notices more than you think. Now really Guy must not come for a week, and there must be no more walks."

Guy however came the next afternoon, and not only was he reproved by Mrs. Grey for yesterday's disaster, but actually he and Pauline were only allowed a quarter of an hour together in the garden.

"I'll go into Oxford for a week," said Guy with inspiration. "And then we shan't be tempted to see each other this week, and if we don't see each other this week, perhaps next week we shall be able to go out again. Besides, I want to make arrangements about bringing the canoe down. My friend Fane has wired to me to go and stay with him. He's up for the Easter vac, working. Shall I go?"

Pauline wanted to say no, but she was even after all these walks still too shy to bid him stay.

"Perhaps you'd better go," she agreed. "But Guy, come back for my birthday."

"As if I should stay away for that! Pauline, will you write to me? At least in letters you won't be shy to say you love me."

"Oh, no, Guy, no. My writing is so horrid."

"But you must write. Pauline, if you want to know why I'm really going away, it's simply to have a letter from you."

"You must write to me first then," she whispered.

In truth Pauline felt terrified to think how she would even begin a letter to Guy. He would cease to love her any more after she had written to him. He would hate her stupid letters.

"I shall be glad to see Michael again," said Guy. "But I suppose I must not say anything about you. No, I won't talk about you. Oxford will be wonderfully quiet without undergraduates, and I shall have letters from you."

Mrs. Grey came out into the garden.

"Now, Guy, I think you ought to go. Because really the Rector is getting worried about you and Pauline."

"I'm going into Oxford, Mrs. Grey."

"Well, that is a charming idea—charming, yes."

"But I'll be back for Pauline's birthday."

"Charming—charming," Mrs. Grey still declared. "The Rector will have forgotten all about it by then."

So Guy left Pauline for a week, and perhaps for more than a week. Margaret and Monica came home next day, and really, she thought, it was upsetting all the old ways of her life, when she found herself not very much interested in what they had been doing. Miss Verney with her ecstatic praise of Guy was better company; but next morning her first love-letter arrived, and she could not resist peeping into it at breakfast.

99 St. Giles

Oxford

April 18.

My adored Pauline,

It's really all I can do to stay in Oxford. Even Fane seems dull and though his rooms are jolly, I long for you.

Have I told you what you are to me? Have I once been able to tell you. . . .

Ah, there were pages crammed full and full of words that she must read alone. She could not read them here with her mother and sisters looking at her over the table. She must read them high in her white fastness at the top of the house. There all the morning she sat, and when she had read of his love once, she read of it again and then again, and once again. How foolish her answering letter would be: how disappointed Guy would be; but since she had promised, she must write to him: and, sitting at her desk that was full of childish things, she curled herself over the note paper.

May

A PLEASANT company of thoughts travelled with Guy and his bicycle on the road to Oxford. In this easy progress the material hindrances to marriage were not seeming very important, and as he thought of his love for Pauline it spread before him, untroublous like the road down which he was spinning before a light breeze. With so much to compensate for their brief parting it was impossible to feel depressed; and as Guy drew near the city he felt he was an undergraduate again; and when he greeted Michael Fane in St. Giles he could positively hear his own Oxford drawl again. It was really delightful to be sitting here in view of his old college; and when after lunch he and Michael started for Wytham woods, more and more Guy was in an Oxford dream and carrying off the fantastic notion of the Parnassian academy with all the debonair confidence of his second year. Yet Guy knew that the scheme was absurd and when Michael argued against it in his solemn way he found himself taking the other side from a mere undergraduate pleasure in argument. Indeed, Michael declared he had become a freshman since he went down, which made Guy stop dead, ankle-deep in kingcups, and laugh aloud for his youth, with hidden thoughts of Pauline to make him rejoice that he was young. He laughed again at Michael's seriousness and flung his scheme to the broad clouds, for on this generous day he and Pauline were enough, and neither anybody else's opinion nor anybody else's help was worth a second thought. The heartening warmth, however, did not last; and when toward evening the sun faded in a

blanche of watery clouds with a cold wind for aftermath, Guy felt Michael might have been more sympathetic. Rather silently they walked back from Godstow, with Pauline between them; so that after all, Guy thought, Michael was still an undergraduate, whereas he had embarked upon life.

That night, however, when the curtains were drawn across Michael's bay-window that overhung the whispering and ancient thoroughfare; when the fire burned high and the tobacco-smoke clouded the glimmer of the books on the walls; when his chair creaked with that old Oxford creaking, Guy forgave Michael for any lack in his reception of the great plan. After all, he was writing to Pauline, while his host was reading the Constitutional History of England at a table littered with heavy volumes, on which he brooded like a melancholy spectator of ruins. He must not be hard on Michael, who had not yet touched life, when for himself the vision of Pauline was wreathing this old room with starry blooms of wild rose. The letter was finished, and Guy went out to drop it in the pillar-box. His old college brooded at him across the road; to-morrow he must go and look up some of the dons; to-morrow Pauline would get his letter; to-night there would be rain; to-morrow Pauline would get his letter! The envelope, as it shuffled down into the letter-box, seemed to say 'yes'.

When Guy was back in the fumy St. Giles room, he decided there was something rather finely ascetic about Michael seated there and reading imperturbably in the lamp-light. His courteously fatigued manner was merely that of the idealist who had overreached himself; there was nothing bilious about him, not even so much cynicism as had slightly chilled Guy's own career at Oxford; rather did there emanate from Michael a kind of mediaeval steadfastness comparable only to those stone faces that look calmly down upon the transitory congregations of their church. Michael had this solemn presence that demanded an upward

look, and once again an upward look, until without conversation the solemnity became a little disquieting. Guy felt bound to interrupt with light-hearted talk of his own that slow still gaze across the lampshine.

"Dash it, Michael, don't brood there like a Memento Mori. Put away Magna Charta and talk to me. You used to talk."

"*You* talk, Guy. You've been living alone all this time. You must have a great deal to say."

So Guy flung theories of rhyme and metre to overwhelm Magna Charta; and, next day, he and Michael walked all over Oxford in the rain, he himself still talking. The day after, there came with the sun a letter from Pauline which he took away with him to read in the garden of St. John's, leaving Michael to Magna Charta.

There was nobody on the lawn, and Guy sat down on a wooden seat in air that was faintly perfumed by the precocious blooms of a lilac breaking to this unusual warmth of April. Unopened the letter rested in his hand: for his name written in this girlish charactery took on the romantic look of a name in an old tale. A breathlessness was in the air, such as had brooded upon Pauline's first kiss; and Guy sat marmoreal and rapt in an ecstasy of anticipation that he would never have from any other letter; so still he was, that an alighting blackbird slipt over the grass almost to his feet before it realized the mistake and shrilled away on startled wings into the bushes behind. The trance of expectation was spoilt, and Guy with a sigh broke the envelope.

WYCHFORD RECTORY
OXON.

Wednesday.

I am writing to you at my desk. I began this morning but it was time to go out when I began. Now it's after tea. Margaret came in just now and said I looked all crinkled up

like a shell: it's because I simply don't know how to write to you. I have read your letter over and over and over again. I never thought there could be such a wonderful letter in the world. But I feel very sorry for poor Richard who can't write letters as exquisite as yours. I really feel miserable about him. And this letter to you makes me feel miserable because I can't write letters even as well as Richard. Mother was glad you thought of going to Oxford because she says we are a great responsibility to her. Isn't she sweet? She really is you know. So I talked to Father myself very seriously. I explained to him that I was quite old enough to know my own mind, and he listened to all the things I told him about you. He said he supposed it was innevvitable, which looks very funny somehow. Are you laughing at my spelling? And then he said it was nothing to do with him. So of course I rushed off to Mother and told her and when you come back we are to be allowed to go out twice a week and in three more months we can be engaged properly. Are you happy? Only, dear Guy, Mother doesn't want you to come back till my birthday. She thinks the idea of you and me will be better when Father has got an Iris Lorti or some name like that. He has never had a flower of it before and he's so excited about it's coming out just when my birthday is. Every day he goes down and pinches the stalk of it. He says it's the loveliest flower in the world and grows on Mount Lebanon. So if it comes out on my birthday, you and I can certainly be engaged in August. Guy, I do hate my handwriting.

Your loving

Pauline.

It was a letter of gloriously good news, thought Guy, though he was a little disappointed not to have had the thrill of Pauline's endearment. Then, on the blank outside page, he saw scrawled in writing that went tumbling head

over heels down the paper: *My darling Guy, I love you and underneath I have kissed the letter for you.*

The sentence died out in faint ink that seemed to show forth the whisper in which it had been written. For Guy the tumbledown letters were written in fire; and with the treasure in his heart of that small sentence, read a hundred times, he did not know how he should endure ten long days without Pauline, and in this old college garden, on this sedate and academic lawn, he cried out that he adored her as if indeed she were beside him in this laylocked air. At the sound of his voice the birds close at hand were all silent: they might have stopped to listen. Then a greenfinch called 'sweet! sweet!', whose gentle and persistent proclamation was presently echoed by all the other birds twittering together again in the confused raptures of their Spring.

The days with Michael at St. Giles went by slowly enough, and their fairness was a wasted boon. Guy wrote many long letters to Pauline and received from her another letter in which she began with '*My dearest*' as he had begged her. Yet when he read the herald vocative, he wished he had not tried to alter that old abrupt opening, for never again would she write in the faint ink of shyness such a sentence as had tumbled down the back of her first letter.

Michael seemed to divine that he was in love, and Guy wondered why he could not tell him about it. Once or twice he nearly brought himself to the point, but the thought of describing Pauline kept him mute: Michael must see her first. The canoe would be ready at the end of the week, and Guy announced he should paddle it up to Wychford, travelling from the Isis to the upper Thames and from the upper Thames turning aside at Oldbridge to follow the romantic course of the Greenrush even to his own windows.

"Rather fun," said Michael. "If the weather stays all right."

"By Jove," Guy exclaimed, "I believe it was at Old-bridge Inn that I first met you."

"On May Day three years ago," Michael agreed.

And, thought Guy with a compassionate feeling for mere friendship, what a much more wonderful May Day should be this when Pauline was twenty. There was now her birthday present to buy, and Guy set out on the quest of it with as much exaltation as Percival may have sought the Holy Grail. He wished it were a ring he could buy for her; and indeed ultimately he could not resist a crystal set on a thin gold circlet that she, his rose of girls, would wear like a dewdrop. This ring, however, could not be his formal gift, but it would have to be offered when they were alone, and it must be worn nowhere but in the secret country they haunted with their love. The ring, uncostly as it was, took nearly all Guy's spare money, and he decided to buy a book for her, because in Oxford bookshops he still had accounts running. The April afternoon wore away while in his own particular bookshop kept by Mr. Brough, an ancient man with a white beard, he took down from the shelves volume after volume. At last he found a small copy of Blake's Lyrics bound in faded apple-green calf and tooled in a golden design of birds, berries and daisies. This must be for Pauline, he decided, since someone must have known the pattern of that nursery wall-paper and, loving it, have wished it to be recorded more endurably. What more exquisite coincidence could assure him that this book was meant for Pauline? Yet he was half-jealous of the unknown designer who had thought of something of which himself might have thought. Oh, yes, this must be for Pauline; and, as Guy rescued it from the dust and darkness of the old shop, he ascribed to the green volume an emotion of relief and was half-aware of promising to it a new and

dearer owner who with cherishing would atone for whatever misfortune had brought it to these gloomy shelves.

Next morning, when Guy was ready to start, Michael presented him with a glazier's diamond pencil.

"When you fall in love, Guy, this will serve to scribble sonnets to your lady on the lattices of Plashers Mead. I shall probably come there myself when term's over."

"I wish you'd come and live there with me," said Guy in a last effort to persuade Michael. "You see, if you shared the house, it wouldn't cost so much."

"Perhaps I will," said Michael. "Who knows? I wonder what your Rectory people would think of me."

"Oh, Pauline would like you. Pauline's the youngest, you know," added Guy. "And I'm pretty certain you'd like Monica."

Michael laughed.

"Really, Guy, I must tell them in Balliol that, since you went down, you've become an idle matchmaker. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. You're sure you won't mind the fag of forwarding my bicycle? I'll send you a postcard from Oldbridge."

Guy, although there was still more than a week before he would see Pauline, felt, as he hurried towards the boat-builder's moorings, that he would see her within an hour, such airy freedom did the realization of being on his way give to his limbs.

The journey to Wychford seemed effortless, for whatever the arduousness of a course steadily upstream, it was nullified by the knowledge that every time the paddle was dipped into the water it brought him by his own action nearer to Pauline. A railway journey would have given him none of this endless anticipation, travelling through what at this time of the year before the season of boating was a delicious solitude. Guy could sing all the way if he

wished, for there was nothing but buttercups and daisies, lambs and meadows and greening willows to overlook his progress. He glided beneath ancient bridges and rested at ancient inns, nearer every night to Pauline. Scarcely had such days a perceptible flight, and were not May Morning marked in flame on his mind's calendar, he could have forgotten time in this slow undated diminution.

O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O, stay and hear; your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low:
Trip no further, pretty sweeting;
Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know.

This was the song Guy flung before his prow to the vision of Pauline leading him.

What is love? 'tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure:
In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

This was the song that Guy felt Shakespeare might have written to suit his journey now, as he paddled higher and higher up the stream that flowed toward Shakespeare's own country.

The banks of the Greenrush were narrower than the banks of the Thames: and all the way they were becoming narrower, and all the way the stream was running more swiftly against him. It was Sunday evening when he reached Plashers Mead; and so massively welded was the sago on his Sheraton table that Guy wondered if Miss

Peasey to be ready for his arrival had not cooked it a week ago. But what did sago matter, when in his place there was laid a note from Pauline?

My dearest,

I've had all your letters and I've been very frightened you'd be drowned. To-morrow you've got to come to breakfast because I always have breakfast in the garden on my birthday unless it pours. I'm going to church at eight. I love you a thousand times more and I will *tell you so to-morrow and give you twenty kisses.*

Your own

Pauline.

Do you like 'your own' better than 'your loving'?

Guy went to bed very early and resolved to wake at dawn that he might have the hours of the morning for thoughts of Pauline on her birthday.

It was after dawn when Guy woke, for he had fallen asleep very tired after his week on the river; still it was scarcely six when he came down into the orchard, and the birds were singing as Guy thought he had never heard them sing before. The apple trees were already frilled with a foam of blossom; and on quivering boughs linnets with breasts rose-burnt by the winds of March throbbed out their carol. Chaffinches with flashing prelude of silver wings flourished a burst of song that broke as with too intolerable a triumph: then sought another tree and poured forth the triumphant song again. Thrushes, blackbirds and warblers quired deep-throated melodies against the multitudinous trebles of those undistinguished myriads that with choric paean saluted May; and on sudden diminuendoes could be heard the rustling canzonets of the goldfinches, rising and falling with reedy cadences.

Guy launched his canoe, which crushed the dewy young grass in its track and laded the morning with one more fragrance. He paddled down the mill-stream and, landing presently in the Rectory paddock now in full blow with white and purple irises, he went through the wicket into the garden. When he reached the lily-pond the birds on the lawn flew away and left it green and empty. He stood entranced, for the hush of the morning lay on the house, and in the wistaria Pauline's window dreamed, wide open. Deep in the shrubberies the birds still twittered incessantly. Why was he not one of these birds, that he might light upon her sill ? Upon Guy's senses stole the imagination of a new fragrance, that was being shed upon the day by that wide-open window ; a fragrance that might be of flowers growing by the walks of her dreams. And surely in those flowery dreams he was beside her, since he had lost all sense of being still on earth. A bee flew out from Pauline's room, an enviable bee which had been booming with indefinite motion for how long round and round the white tulips on her sill. Presently another bee flew in ; and Guy's fancy, catching hold of its wings hovered above Pauline where she lay sleeping. So sharp was the emotion he had of entering with the bee, that he was aware of brushing back her light brown hair to lean down and kiss her forehead ; and when the belfry-clock clanged he was startled to find himself back upon this green and empty lawn. He must not stay here in front of her window, because if she woke and came in her white nightgown to greet the day, she would be shy to see him standing here. Reluctantly Guy turned away and would have gone out again by the wicket in the wall, if he had not come face to face with Birdwood.

" I think I'm a bit early," he said in some embarrassment.

" Yes, I think you are a bit early, sir," the gardener agreed.

" Breakfast won't be till about half past eight ? " Guy suggested.

" And it's just gone the half of six," said Birdwood.

" Would you like to see my canoe ? " Guy asked.

Birdwood looked round the lawn, seeming to imply that, such was Guy's liberty of behaviour, he half expected to see it floating on the lily-pond.

" Where is it then ? " he asked.

Guy took him through the paddock to where the canoe lay on the mill-stream.

" Handy little weapon," Birdwood commented.

" Well, I'll see you later, I expect," said Guy embarking again. " I'm coming to breakfast at the Rectory."

" Yes, sir," the gardener answered cheerfully. " In about another hour and a half I shall be looking for the eggs."

Guy waved his hand and shot out into midstream where he drifted idly. Should he go to church this morning ? Pauline must have wanted him to come, or she would not have told him in her note that she was going. They had never discussed the question of religion. Tacitly he had let it be supposed he believed in her simple creed, and he knew his appearance of faith had given pleasure to the family as well as to Pauline herself. Was he being very honest with her or with them ? Certainly when he knelt at the back of the church and saw Pauline as he had seen her on Easter Day, it was not hard to believe in divinity. But he did not carry away Pauline's faith to cheer his own secret hours. The thought of herself was always with him, but her faith remained as a kind of vision upon which he was privileged to gaze on those occasions when, as it were, she made of it a public confession. Had he really any right to intrude upon such sanctities as hers would be to-day ? No doubt every birthday morning she went to church, and the strangeness of his presence seemed almost an unhallowing of such rites. Even to attend her birthday breakfast began to appear unjustifiable, as he thought of all the birthday breakfasts that for so many years had passed by

without him and without any idea of there ever being any necessity for him. No doubt this morning he, miserable and unworthy sceptic, would be dowered with the half of her prayers, and in that consciousness could he bear to accept them, kneeling at the back of the church, unless he believed utterly they were sanctified by something more than her own maidenhood ? Yet if he did not go to church, Pauline would be disappointed, because she would surely expect him. She would be like the blessed damozel leaning out from the gold bar of Heaven and weeping because he did not come. There was no gain from honesty, if she were made miserable by it. It were better a thousand times he should kneel humbly at the back of the church and pray for the faith that was hers. And why could he not believe as she believed ? If her faith were true, he suffered from injustice by having no grace accorded to him. Or did there indeed lie between him and her the impassable golden bar of Heaven ? A cloud swept across the morning sun, and Guy shivered. Then the church-bell began to clang and, urging his canoe towards the churchyard, he jumped ashore and knelt at the back of the church.

Guy had been aware during the service of the saintly pageant along the windows of the clerestory slowly dimming, and he was not surprized, when he came out, to see that clouds were dusking the first brilliance of the day. Mrs. Grey, Monica and Margaret had prayed each in a different part of the church ; but now in the porch they fluttered about Pauline with an intimate and happy awareness of her birthday, almost seeming to wrap her in it, so that she in flushed responsiveness wore all her twenty years like a bunch of roses. Guy was sensitive to the faint reluctance with which her mother and sisters resigned her to him on this birthday morning ; but yet to follow them back from church with Pauline beside him in a trepidation of blushes and sparkles was too dear a joy for him in turn to resign.

Half-way to the house Pauline remembered that her father had been left alone. This was too wide a breach in her birthday's accustomed ceremony, and much dismayed she begged Guy to go back with her. At that moment the rest of the family had disappeared round a curve in the walk, and Guy caught Pauline to him, complaining she had not kissed him since he was home.

"Oh, but Father!" she said breathlessly tugging. "He'll be so hurt if we've gone on without him."

Guy felt a stab of jealousy that even a father should intrude upon his birthday kiss for her.

"Oh, very well," he said half coldly. "If to see me again after a fortnight means so little . . ."

"Guy," said Pauline, "you're not cross with me? And Father was so sweet about you. He said, 'Is Guy coming to breakfast?' Guy, you mustn't mind if I think a lot about everybody to-day. You see, this is my first birthday when there has been you."

"Oh, don't remind me of the years before we met," said Guy. "I hate them all. No, I don't," he exclaimed in swift penitence. "I love them all. Hurry, darling girl, or we shall miss him."

Pauline's eyes were troubled by a question, behind which lurked a fleeting alarm.

"Kiss me," she murmured. "I was horrid."

A kind of austerity informed their kiss of reconciliation, an austerity that suited the sky of impending rain under which they were standing in the light of the last wan sunbeam. Then they hurried to the churchyard where in the porch the Rector was looking vaguely round for the company he expected.

"Lucky my friend Lorteti came out yesterday. This rain will ruin him. You must take Guy to see that iris, my dear. Fancy, twenty-one to-day, dear me! dear me! most remarkable!"

Pauline danced with delight behind the Rector's back.
"He thinks I'm twenty-one," she whispered. "Oh, Guy, isn't he sweet? And he called you Guy. Oh, Francis," she cried. "Do let me kiss you."

There was a short debate on the probability of the rain's coming before breakfast was done, but it was decided, thanks to Birdwood's optimism, to accept the risk of interruption by sitting down outside. The table was on the lawn, Pauline's presents lying in a heap at the head. As one by one she opened the packets, everybody stood round her, not merely her mother and father and sisters and Guy, but also Birdwood and elderly Janet and Mrs. Unger the cook and Polly who helped Mrs. Unger.

"Oh, I'm so excited," said Pauline. "Oh, I do hope it won't rain. Oh, thank you, Mrs. Unger. What a beautiful frame!"

"I hope yaw'll find someone to put in it, miss," said Mrs. Unger with a glance of stately admiration toward her present and a triumphant side look at Janet, who after many years' superintendence of Pauline's white fastness had brought her bunches of lavender and woodruff tied up with ribbons. All the presents were now undone, among them Guy's green volume, a paste buckle from Margaret, a piece of old embroidery from Monica and from Richard in India a pair of carved bellows, at the prodigal ingenuity of whose pattern Margaret looked a little peevish. When all the other presents had been examined, Birdwood stepped forward and with the air of a conjuror produced from under his coat a pot of rose-coloured sweet-peas that exactly matched the frail hue of Pauline's cheeks.

Breakfast was eaten, with everybody's eyes watching the now completely grey sky. How many such birthday breakfasts had been eaten on this cool lawn by these people who in their simplicity were akin to the birds in their shubberies and the flowers in their borders; and Guy thought of an

old photograph taken by an uncle of Pauline's tenth birthday breakfast, when the table was heaped high with dolls and toys and Pauline in the middle of them, while Monica and Margaret with legs as thin as thrushes' stood shy and graceful in the background. He sighed to himself with amazement at the fortune which like a genie had whisked him into this dear assemblage.

Breakfast was over just as the rain began to fall with the tinkling whisper that forebodes determination. There was not a leaf in the garden that was not ringing like an elfin bell to these silver drops; but, alas, the unrelenting windless rain gave no hope to Guy and Pauline of that long walk together they had expected all a fortnight. There was nothing to do but sit in the nursery and wonder if it would ever stop.

"I used to love rain when it kept me here," said Guy. "Now it has become our enemy."

Worse was to come, for it rained every day faster and faster, and there were no journeys for Guy's new canoe. He and Pauline scarcely had ten minutes to themselves, since when they were kept in the house all the family treated them with that old proprietary manner. The unending rain began to fret them more sharply because Spring's greenery was in such weather of the vividest hue and was reproaching them perpetually for the waste of this lovely month of May.

The river was rising. Already Guy's garden was sheened with standing moisture, and the apple-blossom lay ruined. People vowed there had never been such rain in May, and still it rained. The river was running swiftly, level with the top of its banks, and many of the meadows were become glassy firmaments. Very beautiful was this green and silver landscape, but oh, the rain was endless. Guy grew much depressed and Miss Peasey got rheumatism in her ankles. Then in the middle of the month, when Guy was feeling

desperate and when even Pauline seemed sad for the hours that were being robbed from them, it cleared up.

Guy had been to tea, and after tea he and Pauline had sat watching the weather. Margaret had stayed with them all the afternoon, but had left them alone now, when it was half-past six and nearly time for Guy to go. The clouds, which all day had spread their pearly despair over the world, suddenly melted in a wild transplendency of gold.

"Oh, do let's go for a walk before dinner," said Guy. "Don't let's tell anybody, but let's escape."

"Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere. Anywhere. Out in the meadows by the edge of the water. Let's get sopping wet. Dearest, do come. We're never free. We're never alone."

So Pauline got ready; and they slipped away from the house, hoping that nobody would call them back and hurrying through the wicket into the paddock where the irises hung all sodden. They walked along the banks of a river twice as wide as it should be, and found they could not cross the bridge. But it did not matter, for the field where they were walking was not flooded, and they went on toward the mill. Here they crossed the river and, hurrying always as if they were pursued, such was their sense of a sudden freedom that could not last, they made a circuit of the wettest meadows and came to the hill on the other side. Everywhere above them the clouds were breaking, and all the West was a fiery mist of rose and gold.

The meadow they had found was crimsoned over with ragged robins that in this strange light glowered angrily like rubies. Pauline bent down and gathered bunches of them until her arms were full. Her skirt was wet, but still she plucked the crimson flowers; and Guy was gathering them too, knee-deep in soaking grass. What fever was in the sunset to-night?

"Pauline," he cried flinging high his bunch of ragged

robins to scatter upon the incarnadined air. "I have never loved you, as I love you now."

Guy caught her to him ; and into that kiss the fiery sky entered, so that Pauline let fall her ragged robins and they lay limp in the grass and were trodden under foot.

"Pauline, I have a ring for you," he whispered. "Will you wear it when we are alone ?"

She took the thin circlet set with a crystal, and put it on her finger. Then with passionate arms she held him to her heart : the caress burned his lips like a flaming torch : the crystal flashed with hectic gleams, a basilisk, a perilous orient gem.

"We must go home," she whispered. "Oh, Guy, I feel frightened of this evening."

"Pauline, my burning rose," he whispered.

And all the way back into the crimson sunset they talked still in whispers, and of those rain-drenched ragged robins there was not one they carried home.

'*La belle Dame sans mercy hath thee in thrall!*'

'*La belle Dame sans mercy hath thee in thrall!*'

'*La belle Dame sans mercy hath thee in thrall!*'

The words did not cool Guy's pillow that night, but they led him by strange ways into a fevered sleep.

SUMMER

June

WHEN Pauline reached the Rectory dinner had already begun in the mixture of candlelight and rosy dusk that seemed there more than anything to mark Summer's instant approach, and as with flushed cheeks she took her place at table, she was conscious of an atmosphere that was half disapproval, half anxiety; or was it that she disapproving of herself expected criticism? Positively there was an emotion of being on her defence; she felt propitiatory and apologetic; and for the first time she was sharply aware of herself and her family as two distinct facts. It was to dispel this uneasy sense of potential division that she took up her violin with a faintly exaggerated willingness and that, instead of dreaming of Guy in a corner of the room, she played all the evening in the same spirit of wanting to please.

Her mother asked if she had enjoyed her walk, and Pauline had positively to fight with herself before she could answer lightly enough that the walk had been perfect. Why was her heart beating like this, and why did her sisters regard her so gravely? It must be her fancy, and almost defiantly she continued:

"There was no harm in my going out with Guy, was there? We've not been together at all lately."

"Why should there be any particular harm this evening?" Monica enquired.

"Of course not, Monica," and again her heart was beating furiously. "I only asked because I thought you all seemed angry with me for being a little late for dinner."

"I don't know why we should suddenly be sensitive about punctuality in this house," said Margaret.

Pauline had never thought her own white fastness offered such relief and shelter as to-night; and yet, she assured herself, nobody had really been criticizing her. It must have been entirely her fancy, that air of reproach, those insinuations of cold surprize. People in this house did not understand what it meant to be as much in love as she. It was all very well for Margaret and Monica to lay down laws for behaviour, Margaret who did not know whether she loved or not, Monica who disapproved of anything more directly emotional than a Gregorian chant. Yet they had not theorized to-night, nor had they propounded one rule of behaviour; it was she who was rushing to meet their postulates and observations, arming herself with weapons of offence before the attack had begun. Yet why had neither Monica nor Margaret, nor even her mother, come to say good-night to her? They did not understand about love, not one of them, not one of them.

"Pauline?"

It was her mother's voice outside her door, who coming in seemed perfectly herself.

"Not undressed yet? What's the matter, darling Pauline? You look quite worried, sitting there in your chair."

"I'm not worried, Mother. Really, darling, I'm not worried. I thought you were cross with me."

Now she was crying and being petted.

"I don't know why I'm crying. Oh, I'm so foolish. Why am I crying? Are you cross with me?"

"Pauline, what is the matter? Have you had a quarrel with Guy?"

"Good gracious, no! What makes you ask that? We had an exquisite walk, and the sunset was wonderful, oh, so wonderful! And we picked ragged robins—great bunches

of them. Only I forgot to bring them home. How stupid of me. Monica and Margaret aren't angry with me, are they? They were so cold at dinner. Why were they? Mother, I do love you so. You do understand me, don't you? You do sympathize with love? Mother, I do love you so."

When Pauline was in bed her mother fetched Margaret and Monica, who both came and kissed her good-night and asked what could have given her the idea that they were angry with her.

"You foolish little thing, go to sleep," said Monica.

"You mustn't let your being in love with Guy spoil the Rectory," said Margaret. "Because, you know, the Rectory is so much, much better than anything else in the world."

Her mother and sisters left her, going gently from the room as if she were already asleep.

Pauline read for awhile from Guy's green volume of Blake; then taking from under her pillow the crystal ring, she put it on her third finger and blew out the light.

Was he thinking of her at this moment? He must be, and how near they brought him to her, these nights of thoughts, for then she seemed to be floating out of her window to meet him half-way upon the May air. How she loved him; and he had given her this ring of which no one knew except themselves. It was strange to have been suddenly frightened in that sunset, for now, as she lay here looking back upon it, this evening was surely the most wonderful of her life. He had called her his burning rose. His burning rose . . . his burning rose? Why had she not brought back a few of those ragged robins to sit like confidantes beside her bed? Flowers were such companions; the beautiful and silent flowers. How far away sleep was still standing from her: and Pauline got out of bed and leaned from the window with a sensation of resting upon

the buoyant darkness. The young May moon had already set, and not a sound could be heard; so still indeed was the night that it seemed as if the stars ought to be audible upon their twinkling. If now a nightingale would but sing to say what she was wanting to say to the darkness! Nightingales, however, were rare in the trees round Wychford, and the garden stayed silent. Perhaps Guy was leaning from his window like this, and it was a pity their lights could not shine across, each candle fluttering to the other. If only Plashers Mead were within view, they would be able to sit at their windows in the dark hours and sometimes signal to one another. Or would that be what Margaret called 'cheapening' herself? Had she cheapened herself this evening, when she had kissed him for the gift of this ring? Yet could she cheapen herself to Guy? He loved her as much as she loved him; and always she and he must be equal in their love. She could never be very much reserved with Guy: she did not want to be. She loved him, and this evening for the first time she had kissed him in the way that often in solitude she had longed to kiss him.

"I only want to live for love," she whispered.

Naturally Margaret did not know what love like hers meant; and perhaps it was as well, for it was sad enough to be parted from Guy for two days, when there was always the chance of seeing him in the hours between; but to be separated from him by oceans for two years, as Richard and Margaret were separated, that would be unbearable.

"I suppose Margaret would call it 'cheapening' myself to be standing at my window like this. Good-night, dearest Guy, good-night. Your Pauline is thinking of you to the very last moment of being the smallest bit awake."

Her voice set out to Plashers Mead, no louder than a moth's wing; and, turning away from the warm May night, Pauline went back to bed and fell asleep on the happy contemplation of a love that between them was exactly equal.

The floods went down rapidly during the week; green Summer flung her wreaths before her: the cuckoo sang out of tune and other birds more rarely: chestnut-blossom powdered the grass: and the pinks were breaking all along the Rectory borders. These were days when not to idle down the river would have been a slight upon the season. So Pauline and Guy, with their two afternoons a week, which were not long in becoming four, spent all their time in the canoe. The Rectory punt could only be used on the mill-stream; and Pauline rejoiced, if somewhat guiltily, that they could not invite either of her sisters to accompany them. She and Guy had now so much to say to each other, every day more it seemed, that it was impossible any longer not to wish to be alone.

"Margaret says we are becoming selfish, are we?" she asked, dragging her fingers through the water and perceiving the world through ranks of fleurs-de-lys.

Guy from where in the stern he sat hunched over his paddle asked in what way they were supposed to be selfish.

"Well, it is true that I'm dreadfully absent-minded all the time. You know, I can't think about anything but you. Then, you see, we used always to invite Margaret to be with us, and now we hurry away in the canoe from everybody."

"One would think we spent all our time together," said Guy. "Instead of barely four hours a week."

"Oh, Guy darling, it's more than that. This is the fourth afternoon running that we've been together; and we weren't back yesterday till dinner-time."

Guy put a finger to his mouth.

"Hush! We're coming to the bend in the river that flows round the place we first met," he whispered. "Hush! if we talk about other people, it will be disenchanted."

He swung the canoe under the bushes, tied it to a hawthorn bough and declared triumphantly, as they climbed

ashore up the steep bank, that here was practically a desert island. Then they went to the narrow entrance and gazed over the meadows which in this sacred time of growing grass really were impassable as the sea.

"Not even a cow in sight," Guy commented in well satisfied tones. "I shall be sorry when the hay is cut, and people and cattle can come here again."

"People and cattle! How naughty you are, Guy. As if they were just the same!"

"Well, practically you know, as far as we're concerned, there isn't very much difference."

For a long while they sat by the edge of the stream in their fragrant seclusion.

"Dearest," Pauline sighed. "Why can I listen to you all day, and yet whenever anybody else talks to me, why do I feel as if I were only half awake?"

"Because even when you're not with me," said Guy, "you're still really with me. That's why. You see you're still listening to me."

This was a pleasant explanation; but Pauline was anxious to be reassured about what Margaret had hinted was a deterioration in her character lately.

"Perhaps we are a little selfish. But we won't be, when we're married."

Guy had been scribbling on an envelope which he now handed to her; and she read:

Mrs. Guy Hazlewood
Plashers Mead
Wychford
Oxon.

"Oh, Guy, you know I love to see it written: but isn't it unlucky to write it?"

"I don't think you ought to be so superstitious," he scoffed.

She wished he were not obviously despising the weakness of her beliefs. This was the mood in which she seemed farthest away from him; when she felt afraid of his cleverness; and when what had been simple became maddeningly twisted up like an object in a nightmare.

Yet worries that were so faint as scarcely to have a definite shape could still be bought off with kisses; and always when she kissed Guy they receded out of sight again, temporarily appeased.

June, which had come upon them unawares, drifted on toward Midsummer, and the indolent and lovely month mirrored herself in the stream with lush growth of sedges and grasses, with yellow water-lilies budding, with starry crowfoot and with spongy reeds and weeds that kept the canoe to a slow progress in accord with the season. At this time, mostly, they launched their craft in the mill-stream, whence they glided under Wychford bridge to the pool of an abandoned mill on the farther side. Here they would float immotionable on the black water, surrounded by tumbledown buildings that rose from the vivid and exuberant growth of the thick-leaved vegetation flourishing against these cold and decayed foundations. Pauline was always relieved when Guy with soundless paddle steered the canoe away from these deeps. The mill-pool affected her with the merely physical fear of being overturned and plunged into those glooms haunted by shadowy fish, there far down to be strangled by weeds the upper tentacles of which could be seen undulating finely to the least quiver upon the face of the water. Yet more subtly than by physical terrors did these deeps affect her, for the fathomless mill-pool always seemed, as they hung upon it, to ask a question. With such an air of horrible invitation it asked her where she was going with Guy, that no amount

of self-reproach for a morbid fancy could drive away the fact of the question's being always asked, however firmly she might fortify herself against paying attention. The moment they passed out of reach of that smooth and cruel countenance, Pauline was always ashamed of the terror and never confided in Guy what a mixture of emotions the mill-pool could conjure for her. Their journey across it was in this sunny weather the prelude to a cool time on the stream that flowed along the foot of the Abbey grounds. During May they had been wont to paddle directly up the smaller main stream, exploring far along the Western valley; but on these June afternoons such a course involved too much energy. So they used to disembark from the canoe, pulling it over a narrow strip of grass to be launched again on the Abbey stream, which had been dammed up to flow with the greater width and solemnity that suited the grand house shimmering in eternal ghostliness at the top of the dark plantation. Pauline had no dread of Wychford Abbey at this distance, and she was fond of gliding down this stream into which the great beeches dipped their tresses, shading it from the heat of the sun.

Every hour they spent on the river made them long to spend more hours together, and Pauline began to tell herself she was more deeply in love than anyone she had ever known. Everything except love was floating away from her like the landscape astern of the canoe. She began to neglect various people in Wychford over whom she had hitherto watched with maternal solicitude: even Miss Verney was not often visited, because she and Guy could not go together, the one original rule to which Mrs. Grey still clung being a prohibition of walking together through the town. And with the people went her music. She did not entirely give up playing but she always played so badly that Monica declared once she would rather such playing were given up. In years gone by Pauline had kept white

fantail pigeons: but now they no longer interested her and she gave them away in pairs. Birdwood declared that the small bee-garden which from earliest childhood had belonged to her guardianship was a 'proper disgrace.' Her tambour-frame showed nothing but half-fledged birds from which since Winter had hung unkempt shreds of blue and red wool. And even her mother's vague talks about the poor people in Wychford had no longer an audience, because Margaret and Monica never had listened, and now Pauline was as inattentive as her sisters. Nothing was worth while except to be with Guy. Not one moment of this June must be wasted, and Pauline managed to set up a precedent for going out on the river with him after tea, when in the cool afternoon they would float down behind Guy's house under willows, under hawthorns, past the golden fleurs-de-lys, past the scented flags, past the early meadowsweet and the flowering rush, past comfrey and watermint, figwort, forget-me-not and blue cranesbill that shimmered in the sun like steely mail.

On Midsummer Day about five o'clock Pauline and Guy set out on one of these expeditions that they had stolen from regularity, and found all their favourite fields occupied by haymakers whose labour they resented as an intrusion upon the country they had come to regard as their own.

"Oh, I wish I had money," Guy exclaimed. "I'd like to buy all this land and keep it for you and me. Why must all these wretched people come and disturb the peace of it?"

"I used to love haymaking," said Pauline, feeling a little wistful for some of those simple joys that now seemed uncapturable again.

"Yes. I should like haymaking," Guy assented, "if we were married. It's the fact that haymakers are at this moment preventing us being alone which makes me cry out against them. How can I kiss you here?"

A wain loaded high with hay and laughing children was actually standing close against the ingress to their own peninsula. The mellow sun of afternoon was lending a richer quality of colour to nutbrown cheeks and arms ; was throwing long shadows across the shorn grass ; was gilding the pitchforks and sparkling the gnats that danced above the patient horses. It was a scene that should have made Pauline dream with joy of her England : yet, with Guy's discontent brooding over it, she did not care for these jocund haymakers who were working through the lustred afternoon.

"Hopeless," Guy protested. "It's like Piccadilly Circus."

"Oh, Guy dear, you are absurd. It's not a bit like Piccadilly Circus."

"I don't see the use of living in the country if it's always going to be alive with people," Guy went on. "We may as well turn round. The afternoon is ruined."

When they reached the confines of Plashers Mead, he exclaimed in deeper despair :

"Pauline ! I must kiss you ; and, look, actually the churchyard now is crammed with people, all hovering about over the graves like ghouls. Why does everybody want to come out this afternoon ? "

They landed in the orchard behind the house, and Pauline was getting ready to help Guy push the canoe across to the mill-stream, when he vowed she must come and kiss him good-night indoors.

"Of course I will ; though I mustn't stay more than a minute, because I promised Mother to be back by seven."

"I don't deserve you," said Guy, standing still and looking down at her. "I've done nothing but grumble all the afternoon, and you've been an angel. Ah, but it's only because I long to kiss you."

"I long to kiss you," she murmured.

"Do you? Do you?" he whispered. "Oh, with those ghouls in the churchyard I can't even take your hand."

They crossed the bridge from the orchard and came round to the front of the house into full sunlight, and thence out of the dazzle into Guy's hall that was filled with watery melodies and the green light of their own pastoral world. Close they kissed, close and closer in the coolness and stillness.

"Pauline! I shall go mad for love of you."

"I love you. I love you," she sighed, nestling to his arms' enclosure.

"Pauline!"

"Guy!"

Each called to the other as if over an abyss of years and time.

Then Pauline said she must go back, but Guy reminded her of a book she had promised to read, and begged her just to come with him to the library.

"I do want to talk to you once alone in my own room," he said. "The evenings won't seem so empty when I can think of you there."

She could not disappoint him, and they went upstairs and into his green room that smelt of tobacco-smoke and meadowsweet. They stood by the window looking out over their territory, and Guy told for the hundredth time how, as it were, straight from this window he had plunged to meet her that September night.

"Hullo," he exclaimed suddenly, reading on the pane that was scrabbled with mottoes cut by himself in idle moments with the glazier's pencil:

The fresh green lap of fair King Richard's land.
Michael Fane. June 24.

"That's to-day! Then Michael must be here. What an extraordinary thing!"

Guy looked round the room for any sign of his friend; but there was nothing except the Shakesperean record of his presence. Pauline felt hurt that he should be so much interested in a friend, when but a moment ago he had brought her here as if her presence were the only thing that counted for his evening's pleasure.

"I must find out where he is," exclaimed Guy.

Now he wanted to be rid of her, thought Pauline, and for the first time, when he had kissed her, she kissed him coldly in response. More bitter still was the thought that he did not remonstrate: he had not noticed. Pauline said she must hurry away, and Guy did not persuade her to stop. Oh, how she hated this friend of his; she had no one in whom she would be even mildly interested when she was with Guy. He took her home in the canoe, speculating all the way about Michael Fane's whereabouts; and as Pauline went across the Rectory paddock there were tears of mortification in her eyes that sometimes burnt as hotly even as with jealousy's rage.

Her mother was on the lawn, when she got back, and Pauline blinked her eyes a good deal to throw the blame of tears upon the sun.

"Ah, you're back. Let's take a little walk round the garden," said Mrs. Grey in the nervous manner that told of something on her mind.

They went into the larger wall-garden and walked along the wide herbaceous borders through a blaze of snapdragons that here all day had been swallowing the sunshine.

"Where did you go with Guy?" her mother asked.

"We went down the river, and they're cutting the grass in the big meadow and then afterwards . . ."

"Oh, Pauline, afterwards you went into Guy's house with him?"

Pauline nodded.

"I know. I was just going to tell you."

"Pauline, how could you do such a thing?"

"I only went to say good-night. I wasn't there five minutes."

Why should an action so simple be vexing her mother?

"Are you angry with me for going?"

"You must never do such a thing again," said Mrs. Grey more crossly than Pauline had ever heard her. "Monica saw you go in as she was walking down Shipcot hill, and she has just this moment come and told me."

"But why shouldn't I go in and say good-night?" Pauline asked. "There were people in the churchyard. I thought it was better to say good-night in the house."

Her mother was tremulously pink with vexation, and Pauline looked at her in surprize. It was really unaccountable that such a trifling incident as going into Guy's house could have made her as angry as this. She must have offended her in some other way.

"Mother, what have I done to annoy you?"

"I can't think what made you do anything so stupid as that. I can't think. I can't think. So many people may have seen you go in."

"Well, Mother darling, surely by this time," said Pauline, "everybody must know we are really engaged."

Her mother stood in an access of irritation.

"And don't you understand how that makes it all the worse? Please never do such an inconsiderate thing again. You can imagine how much it upset Monica, when she ran back to tell me."

"Why didn't she come in and fetch me?" asked Pauline. "That would have been much easier. I think she thoroughly enjoyed making a great fuss about nothing. Everybody has been criticizing me lately. I know you all disapprove of anybody's being in love."

"Pauline, when you are to blame, you shouldn't say such unkind things about Monica."

"I have to say what I think sometimes," Pauline replied rebelliously.

"And as for Guy," Mrs. Grey went on, "I am astonished at his thoughtlessness. I can't understand how he could dream of letting you come into his house. I can't understand it."

"Yes, but why shouldn't I go in?" Pauline persisted. "Darling Mother, you go on being angry with me, but you don't tell me why I shouldn't go in."

"Can't you understand what the Wychford people might think?"

Pauline shook her head.

"Well, I shan't say any more about it," Mrs. Grey decided. "But you must promise me never never to do such a foolish thing again."

"I'll promise you never to go to Guy's house," said Pauline. "But I can't promise never to do foolish things, when such perfectly ordinary things are called foolish."

Mrs. Grey looked helplessly round her, but as neither of her two elder daughters was present she had nothing to say; and Pauline, who thought that all the fuss was due to nothing but Monica's unwarranted interference, had nothing to say either; so they walked along the herbaceous borders each with a demeanour of reproach for the other's failure to understand. The snapdragons lolled upon the sun with gold-bloomed anthers, and drank more and still more colour until they were drenched beyond the deepest dyes of crimson, extinguishing the paler hues of rose and chrome which yet at moth-time would show like lamps when the others had dulled in the discouragement of twilight.

"You mustn't think anything more about it," said her mother after a long silence. "I'm sure it was only heedlessness. I don't think you can say I'm too strict with you and Guy. Really, you know, you ought to have had a

very happy June. You've been together nearly all the time."

"Darling," said Pauline utterly penitent for the least look that could have wounded her mother's feelings. "You're sweet to us. And Guy loves you nearly as much as I do."

The gong sounded upon the luteous air of the evening; and Pauline with her arm closely tucked into her mother's arm walked with her across the lawn toward the house.

"It's no good looking crossly at me," she said when like a beautiful ghost Monica came into the dining-room. "I've explained everything to Mother."

"I'm very glad you have," Monica answered austerely; and because she would not fall in with her own forgiving mood, Pauline took the gentle revenge of not expostulating with her that evening when there was an opportunity. Nor would she let Margaret refer to the subject. Her sisters were very adorable, but they knew nothing about love and it would only make them more anxious to lay down laws if she showed that she was aware of their disapproval. She would be particularly charming to them both this evening, but her revenge must be never to mention the incident to either.

The principal result of her mother's rebuke had been to drive away Pauline's anger with Guy and the jealousy of his friend. All she thought now was of the time when next they would meet and when she would be able to laugh with him over the absurdity of other people pretending to know anything about the ways of love or of lovers like themselves. She decided also that, as a penance for having been angry with Guy, she would take care to enquire the very first thing about the mystery of the inscription on the window. Oh, but how she hoped his friend had not come to stay at Plashers Mead, for that would surely spoil this Summer of theirs.

The next afternoon, when Pauline went into the paddock, Guy was waiting for her on the mill-stream, her place in the canoe all ready as usual.

"Have you found your friend?" she asked, faithful to her resolution.

"Not a sign of him," said Guy. "What on earth he came for, I can't think. Miss Peasey never saw him and of course she never heard him. He must have been bicycling. However, don't let's waste time in talking about Michael Fane."

Pauline smiled at him with all her heart. How wonderful Guy was to reward her so richly for the little effort it had cost to enquire about his friend.

"I've been prospecting this morning," he announced as they shot along in the direction of the bridge. "They haven't started to make hay on the other side, so I'm going to paddle you furiously upstream until we find some secret and magical meadow where we can hide and forget about yesterday's fiasco."

They glided underneath the bridge and left it quivering in the empty sunlight behind them; they swept silently over the mill-pool while Pauline held her breath. Then the banks closed in upon their canoe and Guy fought his way against the swifter running of the river, on and on, on and on between the long grasses of the uncut meadows, on and on, on and on past the waterfall where the Abbey stream joined the main stream and gave it a wider and easier course.

"Phew, it's hot," Guy exclaimed. "Sprinkle me with water."

She splashed him laughing; and he seized her hand to kiss her dabbled fingers.

"Laugh, my sweet sweet heart," he said. "It was your laugh I heard before I ever heard your voice, that night when I stood and looked at you and Margaret as if you

were two silver people who had fallen down from the moon."

Again she sprinkled him laughing, and again he seized her hand and kissed her dabbled fingers.

"They're as cool as coral," he said. "Why are you wrinkling your nose at me? Pauline, your eyes have vanished away!"

He plucked speedwell flowers and threw them into her lap.

"When I haven't got you with me," he said, "I have to pretend that the speedwells are your eyes, and that the dog-roses are your cheeks."

"And what is my nose?" she asked, clapping her hands because she was sure he would not be able to think of any likeness.

"Your nose is incomparable," he told her: and then he bent to his paddle and made the canoe fly along so that the water fluted to right and left of the bows. Ultimately they came to an island where all the afternoon they sat under a willow that was pluming with scanty shade a thousand forget-me-nots.

Problems faded out upon the languid air, for Pauline was too well content with Guy's company to spoil the June peace. At last, however, she disengaged herself from his caressing arm and turned to him a serious and puzzled face. And when she was asking her question she knew how all the afternoon it had been fretting the back of her mind.

"Why was Mother angry with me yesterday because I came into Plashers Mead to say good-night to you?"

"Was she angry?" asked Guy.

"Well, Monica saw us and got home before me and told her, and she was worried at what people would think. What would they think?"

Guy looked at her: then he shook his fist at the sky.

"Oh, God, why must people try . . ."

She touched his arm.

"Guy, don't swear. At least not . . . you'll call me superstitious and foolish," she murmured dismayfully, "but really it hurts me to hear you say that."

"I don't think you anything but the most lovely and perfect thing on earth," he vowed passionately. "And it drives me mad that people should try to spoil your naturalness . . . but still . . . it was thoughtless of me."

"But why, why?" she asked. "That's the word Mother used about you. Only, why, why? Why shouldn't I go and say good-night?"

"Dear, there was no harm in that. But you see, village people might say horrid things . . . I was dreadfully to blame. Yes, of course I was."

She flushed like a carnation at dawn; and when Guy put his arms round her, she drew away.

"Oh, Guy," she said brokenly. "I can't bear to think of being alone to-night. I shall be asking questions all the night long, I know I shall. It's like that horrid mill-pool."

"Mill-pool?" he echoed, looking at her in perplexity.

She sighed and stared sadly down at the forget-me-nots.

"You wouldn't understand: you'd think I was hysterical and stupid."

Silently they left the island, and silently for some time they floated down the stream: then Pauline tossed her head bravely.

"Love's rather cruel in a way."

Guy looked aghast.

"Pauline, you don't regret falling in love with me?"

"No, of course not, of course not. Oh, I love you more than I can say."

When Guy's arms were round her again, Pauline thought that love could be as cruel as he chose; she did not care for his cruelty.

July

GUY had been conscious ever since that rose-gold evening of the ragged robins of new elements having entered into his and Pauline's love for each other. All this month, however, June creeping upon them with verdurous and muffled steps had plotted to foil the least attempt on Guy's part to face the situation. Now the casual indiscretion of yesterday brought him sharply against it, and, as in the melancholy of the long Summer evening he contemplated the prospect, it appeared disquieting enough. In nine months he had done nothing: no quibbling could circumvent that deadly fact. For nine months he had lived in a house of his own, had accepted paternal help, had betrothed himself; and with every passing month he had done less to justify any single one of the steps. What were the remedies? The house might be sub-let: at any rate his father's bounty came to an end this quarter: engaging himself formally to Pauline, he could throttle the Muse and become a schoolmaster, and in two years perhaps they could be married. It would be a wrench to abandon poetry and the hope of fame, indeed it would stagger the very foundations of his pride; but rather than lose Pauline he would be content to remain the obscurest creature on earth. Literature might blazon his name: but her love blazoned his soul. Poetry was only the flame of life made visible, and if he were to sacrifice Pauline what gasping and ignoble rushlight of his own would he offer to the world?

Yet could he bear to leave Pauline herself? The truth was he should have gone in March when she was in a way still remote and when like a star she would have shone as

brightly upon him absent or present. Now that star was burning in his heart with passionate fires and fevers and with quenchless ardours. It would be like death to leave her now; were she absent from him her very name would be as a draught of liquid fire. More implacable, too, than his own torment of love might be hers. If he had gone in March, she would have been gently sad, but in those first months she still had other interests; now if he parted from her she would merely all the time be growing older and they would have between them and their separation the intolerable wastage of their youth. Pauline had surrendered to love all the simple joys which had hitherto occupied her daily life; and if she were divided from him, he feared for the fire that might consume her. It was he who had kindled it upon that rosaureate evening of mid-May, and it was he who was charged with her ultimate happiness. The accident of yesterday had reminded him sharply how far this was so, and a sense of the tremendous responsibility created by his love for her lay heavily upon Guy. He must never again give her family an occasion to remonstrate with her: he had been the one to blame, and he wished Mrs. Grey had spoken to him without saying anything to Pauline. How sad this long evening was, with reluctant day even now at half-past-nine o'clock still luminous in the West.

Next morning there was a letter for Guy from his father.

FOX HALL,
GALTON,
HANTS.

June 25.

My dear Guy,

I enclose the balance of the sum I gave you, and I hope it will have been enough to pay all the debts at which you hinted in your last letter. I do not think it would be fair to

you to hamper you with any more money. In fact, I trust you have already made up your mind not to ask for any.

You'll be sorry to hear that Wilkinson has fallen ill and must go abroad at once. This makes it imperative for me to know at once if you are coming to help me next September. If you are, I'm afraid I must ask you to come here immediately and take Wilkinson's place this term. I'm sorry to drag you away from your country estate, but I cannot go to the bother of getting a temporary master and then begin again with you in September. It unsettles the boys too much. So if you want to come in September, you must come now. You will only miss a month of your house and I hope that during the seven weeks of the summer holidays you will be able to transfer yourself comfortably and abandon it for ever.

Take a day to think over my proposal and telegraph your answer to-morrow.

Your affectionate father,

John Hazlewood.

It seemed fateful, the arrival of this letter on top of the doubts of last night. A day was not long in which to make up his mind. And yet, after all, a moment was enough. He ought to go : he ought to telegraph immediately before he could vacillate : he must not see Pauline first : he ought to accept this offer : farewell, fame !

Guy opened the front-door and walked into Birdwood come with a note from the Rectory.

"Miss Pauline took me away from my work to give you this most particular and important and wait for the answer," said the gardener.

Guy asked him to step inside and see Miss Peasey, while he went upstairs to write the reply.

"Miss Peasey doesn't think much of your variety, Birdwood. She says the garden is entirely blue."

"What, all those dellyphiniums the Rector raised with his own hand and she don't like blue!"

Birdwood shook his head to express another defeat at the hands of incomprehensible woman. A moment later, as Guy went up to his room with Pauline's note, he heard him bellow in the kitchen:

"What's this I hear, mum, about the garden being too blue?"

Then Guy closed the door of the library and shut out everything but the sound of the stream.

My darling,

I've got such exciting news. Mr. Delamere who's a friend of ours has asked us to stay in his barge—I mean he's lent us the barge for us to stay in. It's called the Naiad and it's on the Thames at Ladingford and when we've finished with it we're going to have it towed down to Oxford and come back from there by train. Mother asked if you would like to come and stay with us for a fortnight. Think of it, a fortnight! Margaret is coming and Monica is going to stay with Father, who can't leave the garden. Oh, Guy, I'm wild with happiness. We're to start on the first of July about. Do send me a little note by Birdwood. Of course I know there's no need. But I would love to have a little note especially as we shan't see each other till after lunch.

Your own adoring

Pauline.

Guy wrote the little note to Pauline and to his father he wrote a long letter explaining that it was impossible to give up what he was doing to be a schoolmaster.

It was peerless weather when they set out in Godbold's wagonette on the nine miles to Ladingford. Guy was thrilled to be travelling like this with Mrs. Grey, Margaret

and Pauline. The girls were in flowered muslin dresses, seeming more airy than he had ever thought them : and the luggage piled up beside Godbold had the same exquisite lightness, so that it appeared less like luggage than a store of birds' feathers. The thought of nearly having missed this summery pilgrimage made Guy catch his breath.

They arrived at Ladingford toward tea-time and found the barge lying by an old stone bridge about a mile away from the village. Apart from the spire of Ladingford church nothing conspicuously broke the horizon of that flat green country stretching for miles to a shadowy range of hills. Whichever way they looked, these meads extended with here and there willows and elms ; close at hand was the quiet by-road that crossed the bridge and meandered over the low lands, as still and traffickless as the young Thames itself.

The Naiad was painted peacock blue ; owing to the turreted poops the owner had superimposed and the balustrade with rail of gilt gadroons, it almost had the look of a dismasted Elizabethan ship.

" Anything more you'll want ? " Godbold enquired.

" Nothing more, thank you, Mr. Godbold," said Mrs. Grey. " Charming . . . charming . . . such a pleasant drive. Good afternoon, Mr. Godbold."

The carrier turned his horse ; and when the sound of the wagonette had died away, there was silence except where the stream lapped against the barge and where very far off some rooks were cawing.

Guy and Pauline had resolved that they would give Margaret no chance of calling them selfish during this fortnight ; and since they were together all the time, it was much easier now not to wish to escape from everybody. The first week went by in such a perfection of delight as Guy had scarcely thought was possible. Indeed it remained ultimately unimaginable, this dream life on the Naiad.

A pleasant woman in a sunbonnet came to cook breakfast and dinner; and Pauline and Margaret went to Ladingford and bought sunbonnets, a pink one for Pauline and for Margaret one of watchet blue. In the fresh mornings Guy and the sisters wandered idly over the meads; but in the afternoon Margaret generally read a book in the shade while Guy and Pauline went for walks, walks that ended always in sitting by the river's edge and telling each other the tale of their love. The nights with a clear moon waxing to the full were entrancing. There was a small piano on the barge, the notes of which had been brought by damp almost to the timbre of an exhausted spinet. It served however for Mrs. Grey to accompany Pauline while she played on a violin simple tunes. Guy used to lie back on deck and count the stars above Pauline's pavans and galliards: then from the silence that followed he would see her coming, shadowy, light as the dewfall, to sit close beside him, to sit, her hand in his, for an hour while the moon climbed the sky and the fern-owls croaked in their hunting. And as the romantic climax of the day, it was wonderful to fall asleep with the knowledge that Pauline slept nearer to him than she had ever slept before.

"Guy ought to go and see the Lamberts at the Manor," Mrs. Grey announced at the end of the second week. "I've written to Mrs. Lambert. It will be interesting for him."

Guy was thrilled by the notion of visiting Ladingford Manor, which had been one of the great fortresses of romance held against the devastating commercial morality of the Victorian prime with its science and sciolism, and which possessed already some of the fabulous appeal of the mediaeval songs and tapestries John Lambert had created there. An invitation came presently to walk over any afternoon. Margaret said at first she would not go; but Guy who was in a condition of excited reverence declared she must come; and so the three of them set out across a

path in the meads that Guy populated with romantic figures of the mid-Victorian days. On this stile Swinburne may have sat; here Burne-Jones may have looked back at the sky; and surely it were reasonable to suppose that Rossetti might have tied up his shoe on this big stone by this brook, even as Guy was tying up his shoe now. Soon they saw a group of elms and the smoke of clustered chimneys; there golden-grey in front of them stood Ladingford Manor.

"There's the sort of stillness of fame about it," Guy whispered.

He wondered if Mrs. Lambert would now resemble at all the famous pictures of her he had seen. And would she talk familiarly of the famous people she had known? They came to the gate, entering the garden along a flagged path on either side of which runnels flowed between borders of trim box. Mrs. Lambert was sitting in a yew parlour under a blue silk umbrella that was almost a pavilion, and she received them with many comments upon the energy of walking so far on this hot afternoon.

"You would like some beer, I'm sure. There is a bell in that mulberry tree. If you toll the bell, Charlotte will bring you beer."

Guy tolled the bell, and Charlotte arrived with a pewter tray and pewter mugs of beer. Margaret would not be thirsty, but Pauline was afraid of hurting Mrs. Lambert's feelings, and she pretended to drink, lancing blue eyes at Guy over the rim of her mug.

"It's home-brewed beer," said Mrs. Lambert placidly, and then she leaned back and sighed at the dome of her blue silk umbrella. She was still very beautiful, and Guy had a sensation that he was sitting at the feet of Helen or Lady Flora the lovely Roman. She was old now, but she wore about her like an aureole the dignity of all those inspirations of famous dead painters.

"Home-brewed beer," Mrs. Lambert repeated dreamily, and seemed to fall asleep in the past; while in the bee-drowsed yew parlour Pauline, Margaret and Guy sat watching her. The throat of Sidonia the sorceress was hers; the heavy lids of Hipparchia were hers; the wrist of Ermengarde or Queen Blanche was hers; and the pewter tray on the grass at her feet held Circe's wine.

Then Mrs. Lambert woke up and asked if they would like to see the house.

"Toll the bell in the mulberry-tree, and Charlotte will come. You must excuse my getting up."

They followed Charlotte round the rooms of Ladingford Manor. There on the walls were the tapestries that had inspired John Lambert, and there were the tapestries even more beautiful that himself had woven. On the tables were the books John Lambert had printed, which gave positively the aspect of being treasures by the discretion of their external appearance. In other rooms hung the original pictures of hackneyed mezzotints; and how rare they looked now with their velvety pigments of emerald and purple, of orange, cinnabar and scarlet glowing in the tempered sunlight. Margaret, as she moved from room to room, seemed with her weight of dusky hair and fastidious remoteness to belong to the company of lovely women whose romances filled these splendid scenes; but Pauline was life, irradiating with her joy each picture and giving to it the complement of its own still beauty.

"Mrs. Lambert keeps very well, miss," said Charlotte as they came out again from the house. "But of course she doesn't get about much now. Yet we can't really complain, especially with this fine weather."

"Would you like some more beer?" Mrs. Lambert asked, when they joined her again in the yew parlour.

They said they were no longer thirsty; and, having thanked her for the pleasures of the visit, they left her

in the past, returning by the pale green path across the meadows to where the Naiad lay by the old bridge.

"Oh, I did want some tea," sighed Margaret.

"I love Mrs. Lambert," cried Pauline, dancing through the meads. "Wasn't it touching of her to offer Margaret beer? Oh, Guy, when we're married and when you die and I receive young poets at Plashers Mead, shall I offer their future sisters-in-law home-brewed beer? Oh, but I'm sure I shall forget to offer them anything."

Was there any reason, thought Guy, why Plashers Mead should not become a second Ladingford Manor? Friends long ago took that house together: perhaps Michael Fane would after all see the necessity of a second Ladingford Manor and share Plashers Mead with himself and Pauline. After this visit it was impossible to contemplate the prospect of being a schoolmaster: it was impossible to imagine Pauline as a schoolmaster's wife. At all costs their love must be sustained on the pinnacle of romance where now it stood. Margaret would sympathize with his desire to set Pauline in beauty; she, dreading the idea of marrying an Indian engineer, would understand how impossible it was to make Pauline the wife of a schoolmaster. Such a declension must somehow be avoided. It were better they should wait three years for marriage, five years, fourteen years as Tennyson had waited, rather than that he should make the monstrous surrender he had been so near to making. At least he would put himself and his work to the test and in a year he would be able to publish his first volume of poems. Perhaps his father would realize then that he deserved to marry Pauline. After all they were together: there were maddening restrictions of course, but they were together. This visit to Ladingford Manor must be accepted as an omen to persevere in his original intention; for he had been granted the vision of a perfected beauty, which he knew, by reading the lives of the men whc made it, had only

been achieved after desperate struggles and disappointments. This enchanted time on the Naiad must be the anticipated reward of a tremendous industry when he got back to Wychford. He would no more break the rules and fret at the restrictions made for him and Pauline. Every hour when they were together should henceforth be doubled in the intensity of its capacity for being enjoyed. One thing only he would demand, that in August they should be formally and openly engaged. Otherwise when Autumn came and made it impossible to go on the river, they would be kept to the Rectory; and the few hours of her company he would have must at least be free. He would talk to Margaret about it, so that she might use her influence to procure this favour. Then he would write and tell his father. All would be easy; Ladingford had inspired him. He beheld the visit in retrospect more and more clearly as an exhortation to endure against whatever the world should offer him to betray his ambition. Yet was Pauline the world? No, certainly Pauline had no kinship with the world, and therefore he was the more straightly bound to disregard the voice of material prosperity. She had joked about herself as a Mrs. Lambert of the future; but behind the lightness of her jest had stood confidence in himself and in his fame. Should he imprison that spirit of mirth and fire in the husk of a schoolmaster's wife?

The second week passed: the time at Ladingford was over, and early in the morning they must start for the journey of thirty miles down to Oxford. The dapple-grey horse that would tow the barge was already arrived and now stood munching the long grass in the shade of the bridge: the swallows were high in the golden air of the afternoon: the long-purples on the banks of the young river seemed to await reproachfully the disturbance of their tranquillity. To-morrow came: the dapple-grey horse was harnessed to the rope: and then slowly, slowly the

Naiad glided forward, leaving astern the grey bridge, the long-purples on the bank and the swallows high in the silver air of the morning. There was not yet any poignancy of parting; for the spire of Ladingford church remained so long in sight that scarcely did they notice the slow recession; and often, when they thought it was gone, the winding river would show it to them again; and in the end, when really it seemed to have vanished, by standing on the poop they could still make out where now it pierced thinly the huge sky. Moreover the contentment of that imperceptible evanescence and of their dreaming progress down the young Thames was plenary, lulling all regrets for a peace that seemed not yet truly to be lost. The hay in the meadows along the banks was mostly carried, and the cattle were magically fused with the July sunlight, curiously dematerialized like the creatures of a mirage. If a human voice was audible, it was audible deep in the green distance and belonged to the landscape as gently as the murmurous water scalloping the bows. Sometimes indeed they would pass late mowers who leaned upon their scythes and waved good fortune to the journey, but mostly it was all an emptiness of air and grass.

"If only this young Thames flowed on for ever," said Guy.

He and Pauline were leaning over the rail of the barge, and Guy felt a sudden impulse to snatch at the bank rich in that moment with yellow loosestrife, and by his action arrest for ever the progress of the barge, so that for ever they would stay like the lovers on a Grecian urn.

"And really," Guy went on, as already the banks of yellow loosestrife were become banks of long-purples, "there is no reason why for us in a way this river should not flow on for ever. Dear, everything had seemed so perishable before I found you. Pauline, you don't think I ought to surrender my intention, do you? I mean, you don't think I ought to go away from Plashers Mead?"

Guy went on to tell her about the decision he had taken on the day the visit to Ladingford was arranged.

"But it would have been dreadful to miss this time," Pauline declared.

"Oh, I felt it would be impossible," he agreed. "But even if our marriage is postponed for another year, you do think I ought to stick it out here, don't you? And really, you know, few lovers can have such wonderful hours as the hours we do have."

Easily she reassured him with her confidence in the rightness of his decision: easily she assuaged the ache of any lingering doubt with the proclamation of that inevitable triumph in the end.

"But we must be engaged openly," said Guy. "You know, I shall be twenty-three next month. Do you think we can be engaged properly in August?"

"Mother promised in Spring," said Pauline. "Why don't you talk to her about it? Why don't you talk to her about it now? She loves you to talk to her."

He looked round to where Mrs. Grey was sitting in a deck-chair; evidently by the rhythmic motion of her fingers she was restating to herself a tune which had formerly pleased her, as the barge glided on past a scene that changed perceptibly only in details of flowers and trees, while the great sky and the green hollow land and the blue distances rested immutable. Guy came and sat beside her.

"I've never enjoyed a fortnight so much in my life," he said.

She smiled at him, but did not speak, for whatever quartet she was restating had to be finished first. Soon the last noiseless bars played themselves and she turned round to his conversation.

"Mrs. Grey, do you think that Pauline and I can be engaged openly next month? It won't mean, if we are, that I shall be worrying to see her more often. In fact I'm

sure I shall worry less. But I want to tell my father, so that when he comes here he'll be able to see Pauline. He's a conventional sort of man, and I don't think he'd grasp an engagement such as ours is at present. Besides, I want to talk to the Rector, because I feel that now he regards the whole thing as a childish game. So can it be formal next month ? "

Mrs. Grey sat back, so silent that Guy wondered if she had listened to a word he had been saying. He paused for a moment, and then as she did not reply, he went on :

" I also want to say how sorry I am that I asked Pauline to come into Plashers Mead to say good-night to me last month. I didn't realize, until she told me you were angry about it, what a foolish thing I'd done. I don't want you to think that, if we are formally engaged, I shall be doing stupid things like that all the time. Really, Mrs. Grey, I would always be very thoughtful."

" Oh, yes," she answered in her nervous way. " Oh, yes. I understood it to have been a kind of carelessness. But I had to speak to Pauline about it, because she is so very impulsive. It's the sort of thing I might have done myself when I was a girl. At least of course I shouldn't because the Rector . . . yes . . . charming . . . charming . . . yes . . . I really think you might be engaged next month. It's your birthday next month, isn't it ? "

" Thank you more than I can thank you," said Guy.

Mrs. Grey waved to Pauline, who drew close.

" Pauline darling, I've thought of such a nice birthday present for Guy . . . yes . . . charming, charming birthday present . . . yes. . . for you two to be engaged."

Pauline threw her arms round her mother's neck ; and Guy in his happiness noticed at that moment how Margaret was sitting by herself on the poop in the stern. He was wrenched by a sudden compunction, and asked Pauline if he should not go and tell Margaret.

" Charming of Guy . . . yes . . . charming," Mrs.

Grey enthusiastically exclaimed. "Now I call that really charming, and Pauline stays with me."

Guy went up the companion and asked Margaret if she were particularly anxious to be alone. She seemed to pull herself from a day-dream, as she turned to assure him she did not at all particularly want to be alone. Guy announced his good news, and Margaret offered him her slim hand with a kind of pathetic grace that moved him very much.

"I think you deserve it," she said. "For you've both been so sweet to me all this fortnight. I expect you think I don't notice, but I do . . . always."

"Margaret," said Guy. "If this summer Pauline and I have seemed to run away from people . . ."

"Oh, but you have," Margaret interrupted. "I don't think I should find excuses, if I were you, for perhaps it's natural."

"I've fancied very often," he said, "that you've thought we were behaving selfishly."

"I think all lovers are selfish," she answered. "Only in your case you began in such an idyllic way that I thought you were going to be a wonderful exception. Guy, I do most dreadfully want you not to spoil in any way the perfectly beautiful thing that Pauline and you in love is. You won't, will you?"

"Have I yet?" asked Guy in rather a dismayed voice.

"Do you want me to be frank? Yes, of course you do, and anyway I must be frank," said Margaret. "Well, sometimes you have—I don't mean in wanting always to be alone or in asking her in to Plashers Mead to say good-night. No, I don't mean in those ways so much. Of course they make me feel a little sad, but smaller things than that make me more uneasy."

"You mean," said Guy as she paused, "my staying on here and apparently doing nothing? But, Margaret, really

I can't leave Pauline to be a schoolmaster, and surely you of all people can understand that ?"

"Oh, no, I wasn't thinking of that," said Margaret. "I think in fact you're right to stay here and keep at what you're trying to do. If it was ever worth doing, it must be doubly worth doing now. Oh, no, the only criticism I shall make is of something so small that you'll wonder how I can think it even worth mentioning. Guy, you know the photograph of Pauline which Mother used to have and which she gave you ?"

Guy nodded.

"Well, I happened to see it on the table by your bunk, and I wonder why you've taken it out of its simple little wooden frame and put it in a silver one ?"

Guy was taken aback, and when he asked himself why he had done this, he could not find a reason. Now that Margaret had spoken of it, the consciousness of the exchange flooded him with shame as for an unforgivable piece of vandalism. Why indeed had he bought that silver frame and put the old wooden frame away, and where was the old wooden frame ? In one of the drawers in his desk, he thought; resolving this very night to restore it to the photograph and fling the usurper into the river.

"I can't think why I did," he stammered to Margaret.

"You've no idea how much this has worried me," she said. "I never had any doubts about your appreciation of Pauline."

"And now you have," said Guy, biting his lip with mortification.

The landscape fading from the stern of the barge oppressed him with the sadness of irreparable acts that are committed heedlessly, but after which nothing is ever quite the same. He wished he could tear to pieces that silver frame.

"No, I won't have any doubts," said Margaret, offering

him her hand again and smiling. "You've taken my criticism so sweetly that the change can't symbolize so much as I feared."

It was very well to be forgiven like this, Guy thought, but the memory of his blunder was still hot upon his cheek and he felt a deep humiliation at the treachery of his taste. He had meant, when he came here to talk to Margaret, to ask her about herself and Richard, to display a captivating sympathy and restore to their pristine affection her relations with him, which latterly had seemed to diverge somewhat from one another. Now haunted by that silver frame, which with every moment of thought appeared more and more insistently the vile stationer's gewgaw that it was, Guy did not dare to approach Margaret in the security of an old intimacy.

It was she, however, with her grace who healed the wound.

"You're not hurt with me for speaking about that little thing?" she asked. "You see, you are in a way my brother."

"Margaret, you are a dear!"

And then recurred to him as if from Ladingford Manor the lines of Christina Rossetti, which he half whispered to her:

For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands.

They had the sharper emotion for Guy because he had neither brothers nor sisters of his own; and that this lovely girl beside him on this dreaming barge should be his sister gave to the landscape one more incommunicable beauty.

And so all day they glided down the young Thames; and when Guy had sat long enough with Margaret in the stern, he sat with Pauline at the prow; and about twilight they reached Oxford, whence they came to Shipcot by train and drove through five miles of moonlight back to Wychford.

August

PAULINE and Guy with their formal engagement in sight were careful to give no excuse for a postponement by abusing their privileges. The river was now much overgrown with weeds, and in the last week of July rough weather set in which kept them in the Rectory a good deal on the occasions when they met. Guy too was harder at work than he had been all the Summer. The fact of being presently engaged in the eyes of the world was sufficiently exciting for Pauline to console her for the shorter time spent with Guy. Moreover she was so grateful to her family for not opposing the publication of the engagement that she tried particularly to impress them with the sameness of herself, notwithstanding her being in love with Guy. It happened therefore that the old manner of existence at the Rectory reasserted itself for a while; the music in the evenings, the mornings in the garden, everything indeed that could make the family suppose that she was set securely in the heart of their united life.

"When you and Margaret marry," Monica announced, one afternoon when the three sisters were in their nursery, "I really think I shall become a nun."

"But we can't all leave Father and Mother," Pauline exclaimed shocked at the deserted prospect.

"Now isn't that like people in love?" said Monica.

"Ah, but anyway I shall only be living at Plashers Mead," Pauline went on. "So they won't be left entirely alone."

"And as I probably shan't ever make up my mind to be married," Margaret added, "and as I've yet to meet the Mother Superior whom Monica could stand for more than

a week it seems probable that everything at the Rectory will go on pretty much the same."

"Margaret, you will marry. I can't think why you talk like that. If you don't intend to marry Richard, you ought to tell him so now, and not keep him any longer in uncertainty."

Pauline realized that Margaret did not like this direct attack, but it was so rarely that Margaret made it possible even to allude to Richard that she had to take the opportunity.

"I don't think I've interfered much with you and Guy," said Margaret. "Is it necessary that you should settle my affairs ?"

"Oh, don't speak so unkindly to me, Margaret. I'm not trying to interfere. And anyway you do criticize Guy and me. Both you and Monica criticize us."

"Only when you tell us we don't understand about love."

"Well, you don't."

"All of us don't want to be in love quite so obviously as you," said Margaret. "And Monica agrees with me."

Monica nodded.

"Well, it's my character," said Pauline. "I always knew that when I did fall in love, I should fall dreadfully deep in love. I don't want to be thinking all the while about my personal dignity. I adore Guy. Why shouldn't I show it ? Margaret loves Richard, but simply because she's so self-conscious she can't bear to show it. You call me morbid, Margaret, but I call you much more morbid than me."

Yet, though she resented them at the time, Margaret and Monica's continual demands for Pauline to be vigilant over her impulsiveness had an effect ; and during all the month before they were engaged she tried when she was with Guy to acquire a little of the attitude her sisters desired. Circumstances by keeping them for a good deal of the time at the

Rectory made this easy; and Guy exalted by the notion of the formal troth never made it difficult.

Pauline tried to recapture more of the old interests of life at Wychford, and she was particularly attentive to Miss Verney, going often to see her in the little house at the top of the hill and sitting with her in the oblong garden whenever the August sun showed itself.

"I'm sure I'm sorry it's going to be a protracted engagement," said Miss Verney. "They are apt to place a great strain upon people. I'm sure when I read in The Times all about people's wills, though I always feel a trifle vulgar and inquisitive when I do so, I often say to myself 'Well, really, it seems a pity that some people should have so much more money than is quite necessary.' Only yesterday evening I read of a gentleman called Somethingheim who left £507,106 14s. and some odd pence, and really, I thought to myself, how much nicer it would have looked without the seven thousand one hundred and six pounds fourteen shillings and odd pence. And really I had quite a fanciful time imagining that I received a letter presenting it to me on account of some services my father rendered at Sebastopol, which at the time were overlooked. Seven thousand pounds I thought I would present to you and Mr. Guy Hazlewood, if you would allow me; a hundred pounds to the church; six pounds I had the idea of devoting to the garden; and the fourteen shillings and sevenpence, I remember now it was sevenpence, I thought would make such a pleasant surprize for my servant Mabel, who is really a most good-hearted girl, tactful with the cats and not too fond of young men."

"How sweet of you, Miss Verney, to think of such a nice present," said Pauline, who as she watched the old maid's grave air of patronage began almost to believe that the money had been given to her.

"No, indeed, don't thank me at all, for I cannot imagine

anything that would give me such true pleasure. Let me see. Seven thousand pounds at four per cent, which I think is as much as you could expect to get safely. That's seventy times four—£280 a year."

"And Guy has some money—£150 or £115 or it may be only £50."

"Let us call it a hundred pounds," said Miss Verney. "For it would be more prudent not to exaggerate. £380 a year. And I've no doubt the Rector on his side would be able to manage twenty pounds. £400 a year. Surely a very nice little sum on which to marry. Oh, certainly quite a pleasant little sum."

"Only the gentleman hasn't given you the seven thousand pounds," said Pauline.

"No, exactly, he has not. That's just where it is," Miss Verney agreed.

"But even if he hasn't," said Pauline, springing up and kissing her, "that doesn't prevent your being my dear Miss Verney; and so, thank you seven times for every pound you were going to give me."

"My dear child, it would be, as I believe I remarked, a pleasure. I have the greatest dread of long engagements. My own, you know, lasted five years; and at the end of the time a misunderstanding arose with my father, who being a sailor had a hasty temper. This very misunderstanding arose over money. I'm sure the person who invented money was a great curse to the world, and deserved to be pecked at by that uncomfortable eagle much more than that poor fellow Prometheus of whom I was reading in a mythology book that was given to me as a prize for spelling and which I came across last night in an old trunk. My father declared that William . . . his name, I believe I've never told you his name, his name was William Bankes spelt with an E. Now, my own being Daisy after the ship which my father commanded at the moment when my poor mother . . .

when in fact I was born, my own name being Daisy, I was always a little doubtful as to whether people would laugh at the conjunction with Bankes, but being spelt with an E, I daresay it wouldn't have been uncomfortably remarked upon. My father said that William had deceived him about some money. Well, whatever it was, William broke off our engagement; and though all his presents were returned to him and all his letters, the miniature fell out of my hand when I was wrapping it up. I think I must have been a little upset at the moment, for I am not usually careless with any kind of ornament. And when I picked it up, it was so cracked that I could scarcely bring myself to return it, feeling in a way ashamed of my carelessness and also wishing to keep something of William's by me. I have often blamed myself for doing this, and no doubt if the incident had occurred now when I am older, I should have acted more properly. However, at the time I was only twenty-four: so possibly there was a little excuse for what I did."

Miss Verney stopped and stared out of her window: all about the room the cats were purring in the sunbeams: Pauline had a dozen plans racing through her mind for finding William and bringing him back like Peter in Mrs. Gaskell's book. She was just half-way up the hill with fluttering heart, longing to see Miss Verney's joy at the return of her William . . . when tea tinkled in and the dream vanished.

When Pauline told Guy about Miss Verney's seven thousand pounds he was rather annoyed and said he was sorry that he and she were already an object of charity in Wychford.

"Oh, Guy," she protested, "you mustn't take poor Miss Verney too seriously; but it was so sweet of her to want to set us up with an income."

"Besides I *have* got a hundred and fifty," said Guy.

"Oh, Guy dear, don't look so cross. Please don't be cross and dreadfully in earnest about anything so stupid as money."

"I feel everybody will be pitying you for becoming engaged to a penniless pretender like me," he sighed.

"Don't be so stupid, Guy. If they pity anybody, they'll pity you for having a wife so utterly vague about practical things as I am. But I won't be, Guy, when we're married."

"Oh, my own, I wish we were married now. God! I wish, I wish we were!"

He had clasped her to him, and she drew away. Guy begged her pardon for swearing: but really she had drawn away because his eyes were so bright and wild that she was momentarily afraid of him.

August kept wet and stormy; but on the nineteenth, the day before Guy's birthday and the vigil of their betrothal, the sun came out with the fierceness of late Summer. Pauline went with Margaret and Monica for a walk in the cornfields, because she and Guy, although it was one of their trysting days, had each resolved to keep it strictly empty of the other's company, so that after a kind of fast they should meet on the great day itself with a deeper welcome. Pauline made a wreath of poppies for Margaret and for Monica a wreath of cornflowers; but her sisters could find no flower that became Pauline on this vigil, nor did she mind, for to-morrow was beckoning to her across the wheat and she gladly went ungarlanded.

"I wonder why I feel as if this were our last walk together," said Margaret.

"Oh, Margaret, how can you say a horrid thing like that," Pauline exclaimed; and to-morrow drooped before her in the dusty path.

"No, darling, it's not horrid. But, oh, you don't know how much I mind that in a way the Rectory as it always has been will no longer be the Rectory."

Pauline vowed she would go home, not caring on whose wheat she trampled, if Margaret talked any more like that.

"I can't think why you want to make me sad," she protested. "What difference after all will this announcement of our engagement bring? I shall wear a ring, that's all!"

"But everybody will know you belong to Guy," said Margaret, "instead of to all of us."

"Oh, my dears, my dears," Pauline vowed. "I shall always belong to you as well. Don't make me feel unhappy."

"You don't really feel unhappy," said Monica in her wise way. "Because every morning I can hear you singing to yourself long before you ought to be awake."

Then her sisters kissed her, and through the golden cornfields they walked silently home.

When Pauline was in bed that night her mother lingered after Margaret and Monica had left her room.

"Are you glad, darling, you are going to give Guy such a charming birthday present to-morrow?" she asked.

"It's your present," said Pauline. "Because I couldn't possibly give myself unless you wanted me to. You know that, don't you, Mother? You do know that, don't you?"

"I want you to be my happy Pauline," her mother whispered. "And I think that with Guy you will be my happy Pauline."

"Oh, Mother, I shall, I shall. I love him so. Mother, what about Father? He simply won't say anything to me. To-day I helped him with transplanting, and I've been helping a lot lately . . . with the daffodil bulbs when we came back from Ladingford, and all sorts of things. But he simply won't say a word."

"Francis is always like that," her mother replied. "Even when he first was in love with me. Really, he never proposed . . . we somehow got married. I think the best thing will be for you and Guy to go up to his room after lunch

to-morrow, before he goes out in the garden ; then you can show him your ring."

"Oh, Mother, tell me what ring it is that Guy has found for me."

"It's charming . . . charming . . . charming," said her mother enthusiastically.

"Oh, I won't ask, but I'm longing to see it. Mother, what do you think it will be ? Oh, but you know, so I mustn't ask you to guess. Oh, I do hope Margaret and Monica will like it."

"It's charming . . . charming . . . and now go to sleep."

Her mother kissed her good-night and when she was gone, Pauline took from under her pillow the crystal ring.

"However nice the new one is," she said, "I shall always love you best, you secret ring."

Then she got out of bed and took from her desk the manuscript book bound with a Siennese end-paper of shepherds and shepherdesses and rosy bowers, that was to be her birthday present to him.

"What poetry will he write in you about me, you funny empty book ? " she asked, and inscribed it :

For Guy with all of his Pauline's love.

The book was left open for the roaming letters to dry themselves without a smudge, because there was never any blotting-paper in this desk that was littered with childish things. Then Pauline went to the window ; but a gusty wind of late Summer was rustling the leaves and she could not stay dreaming on the night as in May she had dreamed. There was something faintly disquieting about this hollow wind which was like an envoy threatening the trees with the furious winter to come, and Pauline shivered.

"Summer will soon be gone," she whispered, "but nowadays it doesn't matter, because all days will be happy."

On this thought she fell asleep, and woke to a sunny morning, though the sky was a turbid blue across which swollen clouds were steadily moving. She lay watchful, wondering if this quiet time of six o'clock would hold the best of Guy's birthday and if by eight o'clock the sky would not be quite grey. It was a pity she and Guy had not arranged to meet early, so that before the day was spoiled they should have possessed themselves of its prime. Pauline could no longer stay in bed with this sunlight, the lucid shadows of which caught from the wistaria leaves were flickering all about the room. She must go to the window and salute his birthday. Suddenly she recalled something Guy had once said of how he pictured her always moving round her room in the morning like a small white cloud. Blushful at the intimacy of the thought she looked at herself in the glass.

"You're his. You're his," she whispered to her image. "Are you a white goose as Margaret said you were? Or are you the least bit like a cloud?"

Guy came and knelt by her in church that morning, and she took his action as the sign he offered to the world of holding her now openly. In the great church they were kneeling; rose-fired both of them by the crimson gowns of the high saints along the clerestory; and then Guy slipped upon her finger the new ring he had bought for their engagement, a pink topaz set in the old fashion, which burned there like the heart of the rosy fire in which they knelt suffused.

Breakfast was to be in the garden, as all Rectory birthdays were except Monica's which fell in January; and since the day had ripened to a kind of sweet sultriness as of a pear that has hung too long upon a wall, it was grateful to sit in the shade of the weeping-willow by the side of the lily-pond. To each floating cup, tawny or damasked white or deepest cramoisy, the Rector called their attention.

Nymphaeas they were to him, fountain divinities that one after the other he flattered with courteous praise. When Guy had been given all his presents, Pauline saw her father put a hand in his coat and pull out a small book.

"Father has remembered Guy's birthday," she cried clapping her hands. "Now I do call that wonderful. Francis, you're wonderful. You're really wonderful."

"Pauline, Pauline, don't get too excited," her mother begged. "And please don't call your father Francis in the garden."

"Propertius," Guy murmured, shyly opening the book; but when he was going to say something about that Roman lover to the Rector, the Rector had vanished.

After breakfast Pauline and Guy walked in the inner wall-garden that was now brilliant with ten thousand deep-throated gladioli.

"Pauline," said Guy, "this morning I learnt Milton's sonnet on his twenty-third birthday, and I feel rather worried. Listen,

> *How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,*
> *Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!*
> *My hasting days fly on with full career,*
> *But my late Spring no bud or blossom shew'th.*

Well, now, if Milton felt like that," he sighed, "what about me? Pauline, tell me again that you believe in me."

"Of course I believe in you," she vowed.

"And I am right to stay here?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, Guy, of course, of course."

"You see, I shall be writing to my father to-night to tell him of our engagement, and I don't want to feel you have the least doubt of me. You haven't, have you? Never? Never? There must never have been the slightest doubt, or I shall doubt."

"Dearest Guy," she said, "if you changed anything for

me, our love wouldn't be the best thing for you, and I only want my love to be my love, if it is the love you want, Guy. I'm not clever; you know. I'm really stupid, but I can love. Oh, I can love you more than anyone, I think. I know, I know I can. Guy, I do adore you. But if I felt you were thinking you ought to go away on account of me, I would have to give you up."

"You couldn't give me up," he proclaimed, holding her straight before him with looks that were hungry for one word or one gesture that could help him to tell her what he wanted to say.

"Does my love worry you?" she whispered, faint with all the responsibility she felt for the future of this lover of hers.

"Pauline, my love for you is my life."

But quickly they glided away from passion to discuss projects of simple happiness; and walking together a long while under the trees beyond the wall-garden, they were surprized to hear the gong sound for lunch before they had finished the decoration of Plashers Mead as it should be for their wedding-tide. Back in the sunlight, they were dazzled by the savage colour of the gladioli in the hot August noon and found them rather gaudy after the fronded half-light where nothing had disturbed the outspread vision of a future triumphantly attainable.

After lunch her mother called Pauline aside and told her that now was the moment to impress the Rector with the fact of her engagement. The tradition was that her father went up to his library for half-an-hour every day in order to rest after lunch before he sallied out into the garden or the parish. As usual his rest was consisting of standing on a chair and dragging down old numbers of The Botanical Magazine or heavy volumes of The Garden in order to search out a fact in connection with some plant. When Pauline and Guy presented themselves the Rector gave

them a cordial invitation to enter, and Pauline fancied that he was being quite exceptionally kindly in his tone toward Guy.

"Well, and what can I do for you two?" he asked, as he lit his long clay pipe and sat upright in his old leather armchair to regard them.

"Father," said Pauline coming straight to the heart of her subject. "Have you seen my engagement ring?"

She offered him the pink topaz to admire, and he bowed his head, conveying that faint mockery with which he treated anything that was not a flower.

"Very fine. Very fine, my dear."

"Well, aren't you going to congratulate me?" Pauline asked.

"On what?"

"Oh, Father, you are naughty. On Guy of course."

"Bless my heart," said the Rector. "And on what am I to congratulate him?"

"On me of course," said Pauline.

"Now, I wonder if I can honestly do that," said the Rector very seriously.

"Father, you do realize, don't you, because you *are* being so naughty, but you do realize that from to-day we are really engaged?"

"Only from to-day?" the Rector asked, a twinkle in his eye.

"Well, of course," Pauline explained. "We've been in love for very nearly a year."

"And when have you decided to get married?"

Pauline looked at Guy.

"We thought in about two years, Sir," said Guy. "That is, of course, as soon as I've published my first book. Perhaps in a year really."

"Just when you find it convenient in fact," said the Rector still twinkling.

"Well, Father," Pauline interrupted, "have we got your permission? Because that's what we've come up to ask."

"You surprize me," said the Rector, starting back with an exaggerated look of astonishment such as one might use with children.

"Father, if you won't be serious about it, I shall be very much hurt."

"I am very serious indeed about it," said the Rector. "And supposing I said I wouldn't hear of any such thing as an engagement between you two young creatures, what would you say then?"

"Oh, I should never forgive you," Pauline declared. "Besides we're not young. Guy is twenty-three."

"Now I thought he was at least fifty," said the Rector.

"Father, we shall have to go away if you won't be serious. Mother told us to explain to you and I think it's really unkind of you to laugh at us."

The Rector rose and knocked his pipe out.

"I must finish off the perennials. Well, well, Pauline, my dear, you're twenty-one. . . ."

Pauline would have liked to let him go on thinking she was of age, but she could not on this solemn occasion, and so she told him that she was still only twenty.

"Ah, that makes a difference," said the Rector pretending to look very fierce. And when Pauline's face fell, he added with a chuckle, "of one year. Well, well, I fancy you've both arranged everything. What is there left for me to say? You mustn't forget to show Guy those Nerines. God bless you, pretty babies, be happy."

Then the Rector walked quickly away, and left them together in his dusty library where the botanical folios and quartos displaying tropic blooms sprawled open about the

floor, where along the mantelpiece the rhizomes of Oncocyclus irises were being dried; and where seeds were strewn plenteously on his desk, rattling among the papers whenever the wind blew.

"Guy, we are really engaged."

"Pauline, Pauline!"

In the dusty room among the ghosts of dead seasons and the mouldering store amassed by the suns of other years, they stood locked, heart to heart.

Before Guy went home that night, when they were lingering in the hall, he told Pauline that the next thing to be done was to write to his own father.

"Guy, do you think he'll like me?"

"Why, how could he help it? But he may grumble at the idea of my being engaged."

"When do you think he'll write?"

"I expect he'll come down here to see me. In the Spring he wrote and said he would."

"Guy, I'm sure he's going to make it difficult for you."

Guy shook his head.

"I know how to manage him," he proclaimed confidently.

Then he opened the door; along the drive the wind moaned, getting up for a gusty Bartlemy-tide.

Pauline stood in the lighted doorway letting the light shine upon him until he was lost in the shadows of the tall trees, sending, as he vanished, one more kiss down the wind to her.

"Are you happy to-night?" asked her mother, bending over Pauline when she was in bed.

"Oh, Mother darling, I'm so happy that I can't tell you how happy I am."

In the candlelight her new ring sparkled; and when her mother was gone she put beside it the crystal ring, and it seemed to sparkle still more. Pauline was in such a mood

of tenderness to everything that she petted even her pillow with a kind of affection and she had the contentment of knowing she was going to meet sleep as if it were a great benignant figure that was bending to hear her tale of happy love.

ANOTHER AUTUMN

September

GUY became much occupied with the best way of breaking to his father the news of his engagement. He wished it were his marriage of which he had to inform him ; for there was about marriage such a beautiful finality of spilt milk that the briefest letter would have settled everything. If now he wrote to announce an engagement, he ran the risk of his father's refusal to come and pay him that visit on which he was building such hopes from the combined effect of Pauline and Plashers Mead in restoring to the schoolmaster the bright mirror of his own youth. It would scarcely be fair to the Greys to introduce him while he was still ignorant of the relation in which he was supposed to stand to them, for they could scarcely be expected to regard him as a man to be humoured up to such a point. After all, it was not as if he in his heart looked to his father for practical help : in reality he knew already that the engagement would meet with his opposition notwithstanding Pauline . . . notwithstanding Plashers Mead. Perhaps it would be better to write and tell him about it : if he came, it would obviate an awkward explanation and there could be no question of false pretences : if he declined to come, no doubt he would write such a letter as would justify his son in holding him up to the Greys as naturally intractable. Indeed if it were not that he knew how sensitive Pauline was to the paternal benediction, he would have made no attempt to present him at all.

His father kept him waiting over a week before he replied to the announcement Guy had ultimately decided to send

him ; and when it came, the letter did not promise the most favourable prospect.

FOX HALL,
GALTON,
HANTS.

September 1st.

Dear Guy,

I have taken a few days to think over the extraordinary news you have seen fit to communicate. I hope I am not so far removed from sympathy with your aspirations as not to be able to understand almost anything you might have to tell me about yourself. But this I confess defeats my best intentions, setting as it does a crown on all the rest of your acts of folly. I tried to believe that your desire to write poetry was merely a passing whim. I tried to think that your tenancy of this house was not the behaviour of a thoughtless and wilful young man. I was most anxious, as I clearly showed (i) by my gift of £150 (ii) by my offer of a post at Fox Hall, to put myself in accord with your ambition ; and now you write and tell me after a year's unprofitable idling that you are engaged to be married ! I admit as a minute point in your favour you do not suggest that I should help you to tie yourself for life to the fancy of a young man of just twenty-three. Little did I think when I wrote to wish you many happy returns of the 20th of August, although you had previously disappointed me by your refusal to help me out of a nasty difficulty, little did I think that my answer was going to be this piece of reckless folly. May I ask what her parents are thinking of, or are they so blinded by your charms as to be willing to allow this daughter of theirs to wait until the income you make by selling your poetry enables you to get married ? I gathered from your description of Mr. Grey that he was an extremely unpractical man ; and his attitude towards your engagement certainly bears me out. I suppose I shall presently get a post-card to say that you are married on

your income of £150, which by the way in the present state of affairs is very likely soon to be less. You invite me to come and stay with you before term begins in order to meet the young lady to whom with extremely bad taste you jocularly allude as my 'future daughter-in-law.' Well, I accept your invitation, but I warn you that I shall give myself the unpleasant task of explaining to your 'future father-in-law,' as I suppose you would not blush to call him, what an utterly unreliable fellow you are and how in every way you have disappointed

Your affectionate father

John Hazlewood.

I shall arrive at two-thirty on the fifth (next Thursday). I wish I could say I was looking forward to seeing this insane house of yours.

There was something in the taste of marmalade very appropriate to an unpleasant letter, and Guy wondered how many of them he had read at breakfast to the accompaniment of the bitter savour and the sound of crackling toast. He also wondered what was the real reason of his father's coming. Was it curiosity, or the prospect of lecturing a certain number of people gathered together to hear his opinion ? Was it with the hope of dissuasion, or was it merely because he had settled to come on the fifth of September and could not bear to thwart that finicking passion of his for knowing what he was going to do a month beforehand ?

Anyhow, whatever the reason, he was coming, and the next problem was to furnish for him a bedroom. How much had he in the bank ? £4 16s. and there was a blank counterfoil which Guy vaguely thought represented a cheque for £2. Of course Pauline's ring had lowered his balance rather prematurely this quarter ; he ought to be very economical during the next one and, as ill luck would have it, next

quarter would have to provide fuel. £2 16s. was not much to spend on furnishing a bedroom even if the puny balance were not needed for the current expenses of the three weeks to Michaelmas. Could he borrow some bedroom furniture from the Rectory? No doubt Mrs. Grey would be amused and delighted to lend all he wanted, but it seemed rather an ignominious way of celebrating his engagement. Could he sleep on the chest in the hall? and as it wobbled to his touch, he decided that not only could he not sleep on it nor in it, but that it would not even serve as a receptacle for his clothes.

"Miss Peasey," he said, when the housekeeper came in to see if he had finished breakfast. "My father is coming to stay here on Thursday."

Miss Peasey smiled encouragingly with the strained look in her eyes that always showed when she was hoping to find out from his next sentence what he had told her. Guy shouted his information over again, when, of course Miss Peasey pretended she had heard him all the time.

"Well, that will make quite a little variety, I'm sure."

"Where will he sleep?" Guy asked.

Miss Peasey jumped and said that there, she'd never thought of that.

"Well, think about it now, Miss Peasey."

Miss Peasey thought hard, but unfruitfully.

"Could you borrow a bed in the town?" Guy shouted.

"Well, wouldn't it seem rather funny? Why don't you send in to Oxford and buy a bed, Mr. Hazlewood?"

Her pathetic trust in the strength of his financial resources, which Guy usually tried to encourage, was now rather irritating.

"It seems hardly worth while to buy a bed for two or three days," he objected.

"Which reminds me," said Miss Peasey, "that you'll really have to give that Bob another good thrashing, for he's eaten all the day's butter."

"Well, we can buy more butter in Wychford, but we can't get a bed," Guy laughed.

"Oh, he didn't touch the bread," said Miss Peasey. "Trust him for that. I never knew a large dog so dainty before."

Guy decided to postpone the subject of the bed and try Miss Peasey more personally.

"Could you spare your chest of drawers?" he asked at top voice.

Miss Peasey, however, did not answer and from her complete indifference to his question Guy knew that she did not like the idea of such a loan. It looked as if he would be compelled to borrow the furniture from the Rectory; and then he thought how after all it would be a doubly good plan to do so, inasmuch as it would partially involve his father in the obligations of a guest. Moreover it could scarcely fail to be a slight reproach to him that his son should have to borrow bedroom furniture from the family of his betrothed.

Pauline was of course delighted at the idea of lending the furniture, and she and Guy had the greatest fun together in amassing enough to equip what would really be a very charming spare room. Deaf and dumb Graves was called in; and Birdwood helped also, under protest at the hindrance to his work, but at the same time revelling, if Birdwood could be said to revel, in the diversion. Mrs. Grey presided over the arrangement and fell so much in love with the new bedroom that she pillaged the Rectory much more ruthlessly than Pauline, and in the end they all decided that Guy's father would have the most attractive bedroom in Wychford. Guy with so much preparation on hand had no time to worry about the conduct of his father's

visit, and after lunch on Thursday he got into the trap beside Godbold and drove off equably enough to meet the train at Shipcot.

Mr. Hazlewood was in appearance a dried-up likeness of his son, and Guy often wondered if he would ever present to the world this desiccated exterior. Yet after all it was not so much his father's features as his cold eyes that gave this effect of a chilly force: he himself had his mother's eyes and, thinking of hers burning darkly from the glooms of her sick bed, Guy fancied that he would never wither to quite the inanimate and discouraging personality on the platform in front of him.

"The train's quite punctual," said Mr. Hazelwood in rather an aggrieved tone of voice, such as he might have adopted if he had been shown a correct Latin exercise by a boy whom he was anxious to reprove.

"Yes, this train is usually pretty punctual," Guy answered, and for a minute or two after a self-conscious handshake they talked about trains, each, as it seemed, trying to throw upon the other the responsibility of any conversation that might have promoted their ease.

Guy introduced his father to Godbold, who greeted him with a kind of congratulatory respect and assumed toward Guy a manner that gave the impression of sharing with Mr. Hazlewood in his paternity.

"Hope you're going to pay us a good long visit," said Godbold hospitably flicking the pony.

Mr. Hazlewood, who squashed as he was between Guy and fat Godbold looked more sapless than ever, said he proposed to stay until the day after to-morrow.

"Then you won't see us play Shipcot on Saturday, the last match of the season?" said Godbold in disappointed benevolence.

"No, I shan't, I'm afraid. You see, my son is not so busy as I am."

"Ah, but he's been very busy lately. Isn't that right, Mr. Hazlewood ?" Godbold chuckled with a wink across at Guy. "Well, we've all been expecting it for some time past and he has our good wishes. That he has. As sweetly pretty a young lady as you'll see in a month of Sundays."

His father shrank perceptibly from a dominical prevision so foreign to his nature, and Guy changed the conversation by pointing out features in the landscape.

"Extraordinarily inspiring sort of country," he affirmed.

"So I should imagine," said his father. "Though precisely what that epithet implies I don't quite know."

Guy was determined not to be put out of humour and, surrendering the epithet at once, he substituted 'bracing'.

"So is Hampshire," his father snapped.

"I hope Wilkinson's successor has turned out well," Guy ventured, in the hope that such a direct challenge would force a discharge of grievances. Surprizingly, however, his father talked without covert reproaches of the successor's virtues, of the field-club he had started, of his popularity with the boys and of the luck which had brought him along at such short notice. At any rate, thought Guy, he could not be blamed for having caused any inconvenience to the school by his refusal to take up office at Fox Hall. The constraint of the long drive came to an end with the first view of Plashers Mead, at which his father gazed with the sort of mixture of resentment, interest and alarm he might have displayed at the approach of a novel insect.

"It looks as if it would be very damp," was his only comment.

Here Godbold, who had perhaps for some time been conscious that all was not perfectly well between his passengers, interposed with a defence of Plashers Mead.

"Lot of people seeing it from here think it's damp. But it isn't. In fact it's the driest house in Wychford. And do you know for why, sir ? Because it's so near running water.

Running water keeps off the damp. Doctor Brydone told me that. 'Running water,' he says to me, 'keeps off the damp.' Those were his words."

Mr. Hazlewood eyed Godbold distastefully, that is so far as without turning his head he could eye him at all. Then the trap pulled up by the gate of Plashers Mead, Guy took his father's bag, and they passed in together. The noise of wheels died away, and here in the sound of the swift Greenrush Guy felt that hostility must surely be renounced at the balm of this September afternoon shedding serene sunlight. He began to display his possessions with the confidence their beauty always gave him.

"Pretty good old apple-trees, eh? Ribston pippins nearly all of them. The blossom was rather spoilt by that wet May, but there's not such a bad crop considering. I like this salmon-coloured phlox. General something or other beginning with an H it's called. Mr. Grey gave me a good deal. The garden of course was full of vegetables, when I had it first. I must send you some clumps of this phlox to Galton. Of course, I got rid of the vegetables."

"Yes, of course," agreed Mr. Hazlewood dryly.

"Doesn't the house look jolly from here? It's pretty old, you know. About 1590 I believe. It's a wonderful place, isn't it? Hulloa, there's my housekeeper. Miss Peasey, here's my father. She's very deaf, so you'll have to shout."

Mr. Hazlewood, who never shouted even at the naughtiest boy in his school, shuddered faintly at his son's invitation and bowed to Miss Peasey with a formality of disapproval that seemed to include her in the condemnation of all he beheld.

"Quite a resemblance, I'm sure," Miss Peasey archly declared. "Tea will be ready at four o'clock and Mr. Hazlewood Senior's room is all in order for him." Then she disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

"A little empty, I'm afraid," said Guy, as his father looked round the hall.

"Is that water I hear?"

"Yes, the river washes the back of the house."

"And this place isn't damp?"

"Not a bit," Guy declared positively.

"Well, it smells of bronchitis and double-pneumonia."

Guy showed his father the dining-room.

"I've got it rather jolly, I think," he ventured.

"Yes, my candlesticks and chairs, that your mother lent you for your rooms at Balliol, look very well," his father agreed.

Guy led the way to the spare bedroom.

"No wonder you spent all your money," Mr. Hazlewood commented, surveying the four-post bed and the Jacobean furniture. "How on earth did you manage to afford all this luxury?"

"Oh, I picked it up somehow," said Guy lightly. He had decided on second thoughts not to reveal the secret of the Rectory's loan.

When his father had rid himself of the dust from his journey, Guy introduced him proudly to his own room.

"Well, this is certainly quite a pleasant place," Mr. Hazlewood admitted. "If not too draughty with those two windows."

"You must scratch a motto on the pane with the diamond-pencil," Guy suggested.

"My motto is hard work."

"Well, write that. Or at any rate put your initials and the date."

His father took up the pencil with that expression of superiority which Guy most hated, and scratched his name rather awkwardly on the glass.

"I hope people won't suppose that is my ordinary hand," he said, grimly regarding the *John Hazlewood* of his

inscription. During tea Guy wondered when he ought to introduce the subject of Pauline. Beyond Godbold's unfortunate allusion on the drive, nothing had been said by either of them ; and Plashers Mead had not as yet effected that enchantment of his father's senses which would seem to proclaim the moment as propitious. How remote they were from one another, sitting here at tea ! Really his father had not accorded him any salutation more cordial than the coldly absent-minded 'good dog' he had just given to Bob. Yet there must be points of contact in their characters. There must be in himself something of his father. He could not so ridiculously resemble him and yet have absolutely nothing mentally in common. Perhaps his father did himself an injustice by his manner, for after all he had presented him with that £150. If he could only probe by some remark a generous impulse, Guy felt that in himself the affection of wonted intercourse over many years would respond immediately with a warmth of love. His father had cared greatly for his mother; and could not the love they had both known supply them with the point of sympathetic contact that would enable them to understand the ulterior intention of their two diverging lives ?

"It was awfully good of you, Father, to come down and stay here," said Guy. "I've really been looking forward to showing you the house. I think, perhaps, you understand now how much I've wanted to be here ?"

Guy waited anxiously.

"I've never thought you haven't wanted to be here," his father replied. "But between what we want and what we owe there is a wide gap."

Oh, why was a use to be made of these out-of-date weapons ? Why could not one or two of his prejudices be surrendered, so that there were a chance of meeting him half-way ?

" But sometimes," said Guy desperately, " inclination and duty coincide."

" Very rarely, I'm afraid, in this world."

" Do they in the next then ? " asked Guy a little harshly, hating the conventionality of the answer that seemed to crystallize the intellectual dishonesty of a dominie's existence. He knew that the next world was merely an arid postulate which served for a few theorems and problems of education, and that duty and desire must only be kept apart on account of the hierarchical formulae of his craft. He must eternally appear as half-inhuman as all the rest of the Pharisees : priests, lawyers and schoolmasters, they were all alike in relying for their livelihood upon a capacity for depreciating human nature.

" I was merely using a figure of speech," said his father.

Exactly, thought Guy, and how was he ever to justify his love for Pauline to a man whose opinions could never be expressed except in figures of speech ? He made up his mind to postpone the visit to the Rectory until to-morrow. Evidently it was not going to be made even moderately easy to broach the subject of Pauline.

" I expect you'd like to have a look at some of my work," he suggested.

" Very much," said Mr. Hazlewood ; and in a moment with his dry assent he had reduced all his son's achievement to the level of a fifth-form composition. Guy took the manuscripts out of his desk, and disengaging from the heap any poems that might be ascribed to the influence of Pauline, he presented the rest to his father. Mr. Hazlewood settled himself as comfortably as he could ever seem to be comfortable and solemnly began to read without comment. Guy would have liked to get up and leave him alone, for though he assured himself that the opinion whether favourable or unfavourable did not matter, his suspense was sharp and the inexpression of his father's demeanour, that

assumption of tutorial impartiality, kept him puzzling and unable to do anything but watch the critic's face and toy mechanically with the hair of Bob's sentimental head upon his knee.

At last the manuscripts were finished, and Guy sat back for the verdict.

"Oh, yes, I like some very much," said Mr. Hazlewood. "But I can't help thinking that all of them could have been written as well in recreation after the arduousness of a decent profession. However, you've burned your boats as far as Fox Hall is concerned, and I shall certainly be the first to congratulate you, if you bring your ambition to a successful issue."

"You mean monetarily?" Guy asked.

His father did not answer.

"You wouldn't count as a successful issue recognition from the people who care for poetry?" Guy went on.

"I'm not particularly impressed by contemporary taste," said Mr. Hazlewood. "We seem to me to be living in a time when all the great men have gone, and the new generation does not appear likely to fill very adequately the gap they have left."

"I wonder if there has ever been a time when people have not said just what you're saying? Do you seriously think you'd recognize a great man if you saw him?"

"I hope I should," said his father looking perfectly convinced that he would.

"Well, I don't believe you would," said Guy. "How do you know I'm not a great man?"

His father laughed dryly.

"I don't know, my dear Guy, of course and nothing would gratify me more than to find out that you were. But at least you'll allow me to observe that *great* men are generally remarkable for their modesty."

"Yes, after they've been accorded the homage of the

world," Guy argued. "They can afford to be modest then. I fancy that most of them were self-confident in their youth. I hope they were, poor devils. It must have been miserable for most of them, if they weren't."

"However," said Mr. Hazlewood. "All these theories of juvenile grandeur, interesting though they may be, do not take us far along the road of practical politics. I'm to understand, am I, that you are quite determined to remain here?"

"For another year at any rate," Guy said. "That is until I have a volume of poems ready."

"And your engagement?" asked his father.

Guy smiled to himself. It was a minor triumph, but it was definitely a triumph to have made his father be the first to mention the subject that had stood at the back of their minds ever since they met on the Shipcot platform.

"Look here, before we discuss that I want you to see Pauline. I think you'll understand my point of view more clearly after you've seen her. Now, wouldn't you like to take a stroll round Wychford? The architecture . . ."

Guy and his father wandered about until dusk, and in the evening after dinner they played piquet.

"I suppose you wouldn't enjoy a walk in the moonlight?" Guy suggested after the third hand.

"I have my health to think about. Term begins in a fortnight you know," said Mr. Hazlewood.

Guy had pulled back the curtains and was watching the full moon. This, though ten days short of the actual anniversary, was the lunary festival of the night when he first saw Pauline. Might it be accepted as a propitious omen? Who could say? They talked of dull subjects until it was time to go to bed.

Guy had sent a note to Mrs. Grey, suggesting that he should bring his father to tea next day; and so about four o'clock they set out to the Rectory, the lover in great

trepidation of spirit. His father was seeming much more than ever parched and inhuman, and Guy foresaw that his effect upon Pauline would be disastrous. Nor did he feel that the strain upon his own nerves was going to be the best thing for the situation. On the way to the Rectory they met young Brydone, and Guy very nearly invited him to accompany them, in a desperate impulse to evoke a crowd in which he could lose this disturbing consciousness of his father's presence. However, he managed to avoid such a subversion of his attitude; and in a few minutes they were in the hall of the Rectory, where Mrs. Grey, as nervously agitated as she could be, was welcoming them. Luckily Margaret had arrived on the scene before Pauline, and Guy managed to place his father next to her, while he took up the task of trying to compose Mrs. Grey. At last Pauline came in, and Guy seemed to be only aware of a tremendous increase in the noise of the conversation. He realized that it was due to himself's talking nonsense at the top of his voice and that Pauline was vainly trying to get on with his father. Monica had gone to look for the Rector, and Mrs. Grey was displaying the kind of treasures she would produce at a mother's meeting, treasures to which his father paid but the most scant attention. The whole room seemed to revolve round his father who for Guy had become the only person in focus, as he stood there parched and inhuman and perhaps himself a little shy of what he was evidently supposing to be a very mad family. Guy, so miserable was he feeling at his father's coldness of manner toward the Greys, wished passionately that his mother were alive, because he knew how much she would have appreciated them. Monica had now come back with information that the Rector was undiscoverable, so Mrs. Grey volunteered to show Mr. Hazlewood the garden.

"She'll tell you all the flowers wrong," Pauline warned him.

Mr. Hazlewood bowed.

"I'm afraid I know nothing about flowers."

"Guy has learnt a lot from Father," said Pauline. "Haven't you, Guy?"

She was making the bravest effort, but it was hopeless, utterly hopeless, Guy thought.

How the promenade round these gardens that were haunted with his and her delights was banishing them one by one. How endless it was, and how complete was the failure to incorporate his father in a life which his advent had so detestably disturbed. Guy acknowledged that the meeting between him and Pauline had served no purpose, and as he looked forward to the final battle between their wills this evening, he set his teeth with rage to defeat his father, at the moment caring not at all if he never saw him again.

Guy knew, as they were walking back to Plashers Mead, how little worth while it was to ask what his father had thought of the Greys; but nevertheless he could not resist the direct enquiry.

"They seem a very happy-go-lucky family," was the reply. "I thought it extremely strange that Mr. Grey did not take the trouble to be at home for my visit. I should have thought that in regard to his daughter's future I might be considered sufficiently . . . however, it's all of a piece."

Guy hated the mock-modest lacuna in the characterization, and he thought of the many schoolmasters he had known whose consciousness of external opinion never allowed them to claim a virtue for themselves, although their least action always contained an implication of merit.

Guy made some excuse for the Rector's absence and rather moodily walked on beside his father. The battle should be to-night; and after dinner he came directly to the point.

"I hope you liked Pauline?"

"My dear Guy, your impulsiveness extends too far. How can I after a few minutes' conversation pronounce an opinion?"

"But she's not a pathological case," cried Guy in exasperation.

"Precisely," retorted his father. "And therefore I pay her the compliment of not rushing into headstrong approval, or disapproval. Certainly she seemed to me superficially a very charming girl, but I should be inclined to think somewhat excitable."

"Of course, she was shy."

"Naturally. These sudden immersions in new relationships do not make for ease. I was myself a little embarrassed. But, after all, the question is not whether I like—er—Pauline, but whether I am justified on her account as well as on yours in giving my countenance to this ridiculous engagement. Please don't interrupt me. My time is short, and I must as your father fulfil my obligations to you by saying what I have to say."

Even in his speech he was epistolary, and while he spoke Guy was all the time, as it were, tearing him into small pieces and dropping him deliberately into the waste-paper-basket.

"Had I been given an opportunity," his father went on, "of speaking privately with Mr. Grey, I should have let him plainly understand how much I deplored your unjustifiable embarkation upon this engagement. You have, frankly, no right to engage yourself to a girl when you are without the means to bring the pledge to fruition. You possess, it is true, an income of £150 a year—too little to make you really independent, too much to compel you to relinquish your own mad scheme of livelihood.

"I have had the privilege of reading your verse," he continued, protesting against an interruption with upraised

hand. " Well, I am glad enough to say that it seems to me promising : but what is promising verse ? A few seedlings in a flower-pot that even if they come to perfection will serve no purpose but of decoration. It is folly or mere wanton self-deception for you to pretend that you can live by poetry. Why, even if you were an American you couldn't live by poetry. Now please let me finish. My commonsense no doubt strikes you as brutal, but if, when it is your turn to speak, you can produce the shadow of a probability that you will ever earn your own living, I shall be only too willing to be convinced. I am not so much enamoured of my schoolmaster's life as to wish to bind you down to that ; but between being a schoolmaster and being what the world would call an idle young poseur lies a big gulf. Why did not you stick to your Macedonian idea ? Surely that was romantic enough to please even you. No, the whole manner of your present life spells self-indulgence and I warn you it will inevitably bring in its train the results of self-indulgence. My dear Guy, *do* something. Don't stay here talking of what you are going to do. Say good-bye for the present to Pauline and do something. If she is fond of you, she will be prouder of you when she sees that you are determined to fight to win her. My boy, I speak to you very seriously and I warn you that this is the last protest I shall make. You are behaving wrongly : her parents are behaving wrongly. If you must write, get some regular work. Why not try for the staff of some reputable paper like The Spectator ? "

" Good heavens ! " Guy ejaculated.

" Well, there may be other reputable papers, though I confess The Spectator is my favourite."

" Yes, I know. It probably would be."

" It's this terrible inaction," his father went on. " I don't know how you can tolerate the ignominious position in which you find yourself. To me it would be unendurable."

Mr. Hazlewood sighed with the satisfaction of unburdening himself and waited for his son to reply, who with a tremendous effort not to spoil the force of his argument by losing his temper began calmly enough :

" I have never contended that I should earn my living by poetry. What I have hoped is that when my first book appears it would be sufficiently remarkable to restore your confidence in me."

" In other words," his father interrupted, " to tempt me to support you—or rather as it now turns out to help you to get married."

" Well, why not ? " said Guy. " I'm your only son. You can spare the money. Why shouldn't you help me ? I'm not asking you to do anything before I've justified myself. I'm only asking you to wait a year. If my book is a failure, it will be I who pay the penalty, not you. My confidence will be severely damaged whereas in your case only your conceit will be faintly ruffled."

" Were I really a conceited man, I should resent your last remark," said his father. " But let it pass, and finish what you were going to say."

Guy got up and went to the window, seeking to find from the moonlight a coolness that would keep his temper in hand.

" Would you have preferred that I did not ask Pauline to marry, that I made love to her without any intention of marriage ? "

" Not at all," his father replied. " I imagine that you still possess some self-restraint, that when you began to feel attracted to her you could have wrestled with yourself against what in the circumstances was a purely selfish emotion."

" But why, why ? What really good reason can you bring forward against my behaviour, except reasons based on a cowardly fear of not being prosperous ? You have

always impressed on me so deeply the identity of your youthful ambitions with mine that I don't suppose I'm assuming too much when I ask what you would have done, if you had met Mother when you were not in a position to marry her immediately? Would you have said nothing?"

"I hope I should have had sufficient restraint not to want to marry anybody until I was able to offer material support as well as a higher devotion."

"But if . . . oh, love is not a matter of the will."

"Excuse me," his father contradicted obstinately. "Everything is a matter of will. That is precisely the point I am trying to make."

Guy marched over to the fireplace and, balancing himself on the fender, proclaimed the attainment of a deadlock.

"You and I, my dear Father, differ in fundamentals. Supposing I admit for a moment that I may be wrong, aren't you just as wrong in not trying to see my point of view? Supposing for instance Tennyson had paid attention to criticism—I don't mean of his work, but of his manner of life—what would have happened?"

"I can't afford to run the risk of being considered the fond parent by announcing you to the world as a second Tennyson. Thirty-five years of a schoolmaster's life have at least taught me that parents as parents have a natural propensity toward the worst excesses of human folly."

"Then in other words," Guy responded, "I'm to mess up my life to preserve your dignity. That's what it amounts to. I tell you I believe in myself. I'm convinced that beside will, there is destiny."

Mr. Hazlewood sniffed.

"Destiny is the weak man's canonization of his own vices."

"Well, then I *will* succeed," retorted Guy. "Moreover I will succeed in my own way. It seems a pity that we should argue acrimoniously. I shall say no more. I accept the

responsibility. For what you've done for me I'm very much obliged. Would you care for a hand at piquet ? "

" Oh, certainly," said his father.

Guy hugged himself with another minor triumph. At least it was he who had determined when the discussion should be closed.

The next day, as Guy stood on the Shipcot platform and watched the slow train puffing away into the unadventurous country, he had a brief sentiment of regret for the failure of his father's visit and made up his mind to write to him a letter to-morrow, which would sweeten a little of the bitterness between them. The bees buzzing round the wine-dark dahlias along the platform were once again audible : and close at hand was the hum of a reaper-and-binder. But as he drove back to Wychford his father passed from his mind, and mostly Guy thought of walking with Pauline under the pale and ardent blue of this September sky that was reflected in the chicory flowers along the sparse and dusty hedgerow.

October

"MY dears, he frightened me to death," Pauline declared to her family when Mr. Hazlewood had left the Rectory. "Only I expect, you know, that really he's rather sweet."

"I don't think he approved of us very much," said Margaret.

"I didn't approve of him very much," said Monica.

"And where was Francis?" asked Mrs. Grey.

"Francis was a naughty boy," said Pauline.

Since they were sitting in the nursery, her mother allowed the Christian name to pass without reproof.

"He was so exactly like Guy," said Margaret.

"Like Guy?" Pauline echoed incredulously.

"Yes, of course, didn't you notice that?" Margaret laughed.

"You're quite right, Margaret," said Mrs. Grey. "How clever of you to see. Now of course I realize how much alike they were . . . how clever you are!"

"Without Pauline," Margaret went on, "Guy might easily become his father all over again."

"But, my dears," said Pauline, "that would be terrible. I remember how frightened I was of Guy the first day he came to the Rectory, and if he grows more like his father, I don't think I shall ever be anything else but frightened of him, even if we live for ever. For, though I'm sure he's really very sweet, I don't believe one would ever get *quite* used to Mr. Hazlewood."

Yet when Pauline was alone and had an opportunity to look back upon the visit, its effect was rather encouraging

than otherwise. For one thing it curiously made Guy more actual, because until the personality of his father projected itself upon the scene of their love he had always possessed for Pauline a kind of romantic unreality. In the Spring days and Summer days which had seemed to dedicate themselves to the service of intimacy, Guy had talked a great deal of his life before they met, but the more he had told her, the more was she in the state of being unable to realize that the central figure of these old tales was not a dream. When he was with her, she was often in a daze of wonder at the credibility of being loved like this; and there was never an occasion of seeing him even after the briefest absence that did not hold in the heart of its pleasure a surprize at his return. The appearance of Mr. Hazlewood was a phenomenon that gave the pledge of prosaic authority to her love, like a statement in print that however absurd or uncomfortable has a value so far beyond mere talk. She had often been made rather miserable by Guy's tales of the ladies he had loved with airy heedlessness, but these heroines had all faded out in the unreality of his life apart from her, and they took their place with days of adventure described in Macedonia or with the old diversions of Oxford. The visit of Mr. Hazlewood with the chilly disapproval it had shed was more authentic than, for instance, the idea of Guy's dark-eyed mother, who had seemed in his narrations almost to threaten Pauline with her son's fairy ancestry, as if from the grave she might at any moment summon him away. Mr. Hazlewood had carried with him a wonderful assurance of ordinariness. The merely external resemblance between him and his son proved that Guy could grow old; and the sense of his opposition was a trifling discomfort in comparison with the assurance he offered of an imaginable future. She remembered that her first idea of Guy had been that of someone dry and cynical; and no doubt this first impression of his father was equally wrong.

She who had been so shy and speechless was no doubt much to blame, and the family had done nothing to help out the situation. It had been unkind of her father to hide himself, since to Mr. Hazlewood, who could not have understood that it was the sort of thing her father would be sure to do, such behaviour must have presented itself very oddly.

The Rector on Pauline's remonstrating with him was not at all penitent.

"When your marriage, my dear, comes on the horizon—I don't mind how faint a horizon—of the probable, then it will be time to discuss matters in the practical way I suppose Mr. Hazlewood would like them to be discussed. Moreover in any case I forgot that the worthy gentleman was coming."

Pauline was anxious to make excuses for the Rector to Guy, but Guy when he came round next day was only apologetic for his own father's behaviour; and he and she came to a conclusion in the end that parents must be forgiven on account of their age.

"At the same time," Guy added, "I blame my father for his conventional outlook. He doesn't seem able to realize the extraordinary help that you are to my work. In fact he doesn't realize that my work *is* work. He's been teaching for so many years that now he can no longer learn anything. Your father's behaviour is reasonable. He doesn't take us quite seriously, but he leaves the situation to our disentanglement. Well, we shall convince him that nothing in the world is so simple as a love like ours; but the worst of my father is that even if he were convinced he would be more annoying than ever."

"You must make allowances, Guy. For one thing how few people, even when they're young, understand about love. Besides, he's anxious about your career."

"What right has he to be anxious?" Guy burst out. "If I fail, I pay the penalty, not he."

" But he would be so hurt if you failed," she urged.

" Pauline, if you can say that, you can imagine that I will fail. Even you are beginning to have doubts."

" I haven't any doubts," she whispered. " I know you will be famous. And yet I have doubts of another sort. I sometimes wonder if I shall be enough when you are famous."

The question she had raised launched Guy upon a sea of eloquence. He worried no more about his father, but only protested his dependence upon Pauline's love for everything that he would ever have accomplished.

" Yes, but I think I shall seem dull one day," she persisted with a shake of the head.

" No, no. How could you seem dull to me ? "

" But I'm not clever . . ."

" Avoid that wretched word," he cried. " It can only be applied to thieves, politicians and lawyers. I have told you a thousand times what you are to me, and I will not tell you again because I don't want to be an egotist. I don't want to represent you to myself as a creature that exists *for* me. You are a being to whom I aspire. If we live for ever I shall have still to aspire to you and never be nearer than the hope of deserving you."

" But your poetry, Guy, are you sure I appreciate it ? Are you sure I'm not just a silly little thing lost in admiration of whatever you do ? "

Guy brushed her doubts aside.

" Poetry is life trembling on the edge of human expression," he declared. " You are my life, and my poor verse faints in its powerlessness to say so. I always must be alone to blame if the treasure that you are is not proved to the world."

How was she to convince him of her unworthiness, how was she to persuade this lover of hers that she was too simple a creature for his splendid enthronement ? Suddenly one

day he would see her in all her dulness and ordinariness, and turning from her in disillusion, he would hold her culpable for anything in his work that might seem to have betrayed his ambition.

"Guy," she called into the future. "You will always love me?"

"Will there ever be another Pauline?"

"Oh, there might be so easily."

"Never! Never! Every hour, every moment cries 'never!'"

In her heart she told herself that at least none but she could ever love him so well; and in the strange confidence his father's visit had given to her she told him in her turn how every hour and every moment made her more dependent upon his love.

"I want nothing but you, nothing, nothing. I've given up everything for you."

"What have you given up?" he demanded at once, jealously and triumphantly regarding her.

"Oh, nothing really; but all the foolish little interests. Nothing, my dearest; only pigeons and music and working woollen birds and visiting poor people. Such foolish little things . . . and yet things that were once upon a time frightfully important."

"You mustn't give up your music and your pigeons."

They both laughed at the absurd conjunction.

"How can I play when I'm thinking of you always, every second? Why, when I do anything but think of you, every object and every word floats away as it does when I'm tired and trying to keep awake in a big room."

"You can play to me," he argued, "even when I'm not there."

"Guy darling, I do, I do; but you've no idea how hopelessly playing to an absent lover destroys the time."

The memory of Mr. Hazlewood's visit was soon lost in

the celebration of their anniversary month. As they had promised themselves in Summer, they went on moonlit expeditions to gather mushrooms; and at the waning of the moon they rose early on many milkwhite dawns instead, when the mushrooms at such an hour were veritably the spoil of dew, gleaming in their baskets under veils of gossamer. On these serene mornings the sound of autumnal birdsong came to them out of misted trees, so that they used to talk of the woods in the next Springtime, themselves moving about the wan vapours with that very air of people who scarcely live in the present. There was in this plaintive music of robins and thrushes a regret for the days of Summer spent together that were now passed away, and yet a more robust melody might have affronted the wistful air of these milkwhite dawns. The frail notes of the birds hinted at silence beyond, and through the opalescent and transuming landscape Guy and Pauline floated in fancy once more down the young Thames from Ladingford. The sad stillness of the year's surrender to decline admonished them to garner these hours, making a ghost even of the sun as if to warn them of the fleeting world, the covetous and furtive world. They wonderfully enjoyed these hours, but Pauline when at breakfast the mushrooms came fizzling to the table could never believe that she had been with Guy, and she used often to be discontented on being reminded by her mother of how much of the day she had already spent in his company. Looking back at these immaterial mornings of autumnal mist, she saw them upon the confines of sleep: silvery spaces they seemed that were not robbed from any familiar time.

There was during all this month a certain amount of congratulation which had to be endured, and Margaret was angry one day because Mr. and Mrs. Ford came over from Little Fairfield and alluded at tea to their hope of Richard and her soon being engaged. Pauline was naturally subject

to the inquisitiveness of everybody, but as she could not without being absent-minded talk about anything except Guy, she found the general curiosity not very troublesome. Guy, however, resented this atmosphere of enquiry and was always more and more anxious to carry her out of reach of Wychford gossip.

One day in mid-October they had set out together with the intention of taking a long walk to the open upland country on the other side of the town, when, as they were going up High Street, they saw two of the local chatter-boxes.

"I will not stop and talk to Mrs. Brydone and Mrs. Willsher," Guy grumbled. "Let's cut up Abbey Lane."

They turned aside and were making their way to the path that led under the Abbey wall to the high road, when they saw Dr. Brydone and his son coming from that direction.

"Really, there's a conspiracy of Brydones to waylay us this afternoon," Guy exclaimed petulantly. "We shall have to go through the Abbey grounds."

Pauline had passed the wicket, which he had impulsively flung open, before she realized the violation of one of her agelong rules.

"It's really rather jolly in here to-day," said Guy. "I think we're duffers not to come more often, you know."

The autumn wind was booming round the plantation, and sweeping up the broad path down the hillside with a skelter of leaves that gave a wild gaiety to the usually tristful scene.

"Why shouldn't we explore inside?" suggested Guy. "There's something so exhilarating about this great West wind. Almost one could fancy it might blow away that ghost of a house."

Pauline hesitated: since earliest childhood the Abbey had oppressed her with ill omen, and she could not overcome her prejudice in a moment.

"You're not really afraid when you're with me?" he persisted.

Pauline surrendered, and they went across the etiolated lawn toward the entrance. The wind was roaring through every crevice, and the ivy was scratching restlessly at the panes or shivering where through the gaps it had crept in with furry tendrils.

"It's rather fun to be walking up this staircase as if this were our own house," said Guy.

Pauline had an impulse to go back, and she made a quick step to descend.

"Where are you going?"

"Guy, I think I feel afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Oh, not of anything. Just afraid."

"Come, foolish one," he whispered gently.

And she, though it was against her will, followed him up the echoing empty stairs.

They went into every room, and Guy declared how they with their love were restoring to each of them the life it had known in the past. Here was a pleasant fancy, and Pauline hoped it might be true. In the thought that their presence was in a way the bestowal of charity on these maltreated halls she lost much of her alarm and began to enjoy the solitude spent with Guy. Whether they looked out at the wilderness that once was a garden or at the rank lawn in front, the thunderous wind surging round the house brought them closer together in the consciousness of their own shelter and their own peace in this deserted habitation.

"Now, confess," said Guy. "Haven't we been rather stupid to neglect such a refuge?"

"But, Guy, we haven't needed a refuge very often," objected Pauline, who for all that she was losing some of her dread of the Abbey was by no means inclined to set up a precedent for going there too often.

"Not yet," he admitted. "But with winter coming on and the wet days that will either keep us indoors or else prevent us from doing anything but walk perpetually along splashy roads, we shan't be sorry to have a place like this to which we can retreat in comparative comfort."

"Oh, Guy," Pauline asked anxiously. "I suppose we ought to come here?"

"Why on earth not?"

"Don't be angry. But the idea just flashed through my mind that perhaps Mother wouldn't like us to come here *very* often."

He sighed deeply.

"Really, sometimes I wonder what is the good of being engaged. Are we for ever to be hemmed in by the conventions of a place like Wychford?"

"Oh, but I expect Mother wouldn't mind really," said Pauline, reassuring herself and him. "I'm always liable to these fits of doubt. Sometimes I feel quite weighed down by the responsibility of being grown up."

She laughed at herself, and the laughter ringing through the hollow house seemed to return and mock her with a mirthless echo.

"Oh, Guy," she exclaimed. "Oh, Guy, I wish I hadn't laughed then. Did you hear how strangely it seemed as if the house laughed back at me?"

She had gripped his arm, and Guy startled by her gesture exclaimed rather irritably that she ought to control her nerves.

"Well, don't let's stay in this room. I don't like the green light that the ivy is giving your face."

"What next?" he grumbled. "Well, let's go out on the balcony."

They went half way downstairs to the door that opened on a large balustraded terrace with steps leading from either end into the ruined garden. The wind beat against

them with such force here that very soon they went back into the house, and Guy found a small room looking out on the terrace, in which he persuaded Pauline to come and sit for a while. All the other rooms in the house had been so dreadfully decayed, so much battered by every humiliation time could inflict upon them that this small parlour was in contrast positively habitable. It gave the impression of being perhaps the last place to which the long vanished owners had desperately held. There was a rusty hob-grate and in the window a deep wooden seat; while the walls were still painted with courtly scenes, and the inlaid wooden floor gave a decency which everywhere else had been destroyed by the mouldering boards.

"I say, it would be fun to light a fire some time," said Guy. "This is just the room for us."

"It's rather a frightening room," said Pauline doubtfully.

"Dearest, you insist on being frightened by everything this afternoon," he answered.

"No, but this room is frightening, Guy," she persisted. "This seems so near to being lived in by dead people."

"And what can dead people do to you and me?" he asked with that sidelong mocking smile which she half disliked, half loved.

Pauline looked back over her shoulder once: then she came across to where he invited her to sit in the window-bay.

"I ought to have brought my diamond pencil," he said. "This is such a window for mottoes. Why, I declare! Somebody has scrawled one. Look, Pauline. Pauline, look! *1770. R.G. P.F.* inside a heart. Oh, what a pity it wasn't *P.G.* for Pauline Grey. Still the *G* can stand for Guy. Oh, really, I think it's an extraordinary coincidence! *P.F.*? We can find out which of the Fentons that was. We'll look up in the history of the family. Darling, I am so glad we came to this little room. Think of those lovers

who sat here once like us. Pauline, it makes me cherish you so."

She sat upon his knee, because the window seat was dusty and because in this place of fled lovers she wanted to be held closely to his heart.

The wind boomed and moaned, and the sun breaking through the clouds lit up the walls with a wild yellow light.

Suddenly Pauline drew away from his arms.

"Shadows went by the window," she cried. "Guy, I feel afraid. I feel afraid. There's a footstep."

She was lily-white, whose cheeks had but now been burning so fiercely.

"Nonsense," he replied half-roughly. "It was that burst of sunshine."

"Guy, there were shadows. Hark!"

She nearly screamed, because footsteps were going down the stairs of the empty house.

"It must have been the caretaker," said Guy.

"I saw a white person. Guy, never never let us come here again."

"You don't seriously think you saw a ghost?" he asked.

"Guy, how do I know? Come away, into the air. We should never have come here. Oh, this room! I feel as if I should faint."

"I'll see who it was," said Guy springing up.

"No, don't leave me. Wait for me. I'll come with you."

They hurried down the stairs and when they reached the pallid lawn they saw Margaret and Monica in their white coats disappearing among the yew trees by the entrance.

"There are your ghosts," said Guy laughing.

Yet, though Guy scoffed at her fears, Pauline was not sure that she would not have preferred a ghost to that disquieting passage of her sisters without hail or comment.

Yet perhaps after all they had not seen her and Guy in that sinister small parlour.

"Shall we catch them up?" he asked.

And Pauline with a breath of dismay was conscious of an inclination to pretend that they had not been here this afternoon. She discovered herself, as it were, proposing to Guy that they should not overtake Monica and Margaret. A secretiveness she had never known before had seized her soul, and she hoped that their presence in the Abbey was unknown. Guy divined at once that she did not want to overtake her sisters, and he kept her under the trees, where they watched each assault of the wind tearing at the little foliage that still remained. He guided her tenderly away from the sight of the house; and they walked along the broad path down through the shrubbery, meeting a rout of brown and red and yellow leaves that swept by them. She clung to Guy's arm as if this urgent and tumultuous wind had the power to sweep her too into the confusion: such an affraying journey was life beginning to seem. This ghastly elation of the October weather would not allow her breath to examine the perplexity in which she had involved herself. She felt that if the wind blew any louder, she would have to scream out in defiance of its violence or else surrender miserably and be whirled into oblivion. A brown oakleaf had escaped from the perishable host and was palpitating in a fold of her sleeve like a hunted creature; but when Pauline would have rescued it at the same moment a gust came roaring up the walk under the hissing trees, and the driven leaf was torn from its refuge and flung high into the air to join the myriads in their giddy riot of death.

"Come away from here," she cried to Guy. "Come away or I shall go mad in this wind."

He looked at her with a sort of judicial demeanour, as if he were in doubt whether he ought not to reprove such excitement.

"It was really beginning to blow quite fiercely," he said when they had reached the comparative stillness of Abbey Lane.

Behind them Pauline still heard with terror and hatred the moaning of the trees, and she hurried away from the sound.

"Never, never will I go there again. Why did you ask me to go there? I would sooner have met a thousand Brydones than have been in that house."

"Pauline," he protested. "You really do sometimes encourage yourself to be overwrought."

"Guy, don't lecture me," she said, turning upon him fiercely.

"Well, don't let the whole of Wychford see that you're in a temper," he retorted. "People haven't yet got over the idea of us two as a natural curiosity of the neighbourhood. I don't want . . . and I don't suppose you're very anxious for these yokels to discuss our quarrels in the post-office to-night."

"I don't mind what anybody does," said Pauline desperately. "I only want to be out of this wind—this wind."

She was rather glad that Guy, perhaps to punish her for the loss of control, said he must go and work instead of coming back to tea at the Rectory. It strangely gave her the ability to smile at him and be in their parting herself again, whereas had he come back with her she knew that she would still have felt irritated. Her smile may have abashed his ill-humour, for he seemed inclined to change his mind about the need for work; but she would not let him and hurried towards home at the back of the west wind. Should she ask her sisters if they had seen her in the Abbey? It would be better to wait until they said something first. It would really be best to say nothing about this afternoon. Tea was in the nursery that day, for the Rector was holding some sort of colloquy in the drawing-room which

he always used for parochial business, because he dreaded having his seeds scattered by the awkward fingers of the flock.

Tea had not come in yet, and Pauline took her familiar seat in the window, glad to be out of the wind but pondering a little mournfully the lawn mottled with leaves, and the lily-pond that was being seamed and crinkled by every gust that skated across the surface. When the others arrived, Pauline knew that she turned round to greet them defiantly, although she would have given much not to feel excuseful like this.

"You didn't see Monica and me ?" Margaret asked.

"Only after you'd gone too far for us to call to you," Pauline answered, nervously assuring herself that Margaret had not tried to 'catch her out,' as Janet would have said.

"We had taken the short cut through the Abbey," Monica explained.

Pauline felt that what Monica meant to say had been: 'we did not spy upon you deliberately.' And that she should have had this instinct of putting her sisters in the wrong prepared her for something unpleasant, that and the fuss her mother was making over the tea-tray. Pauline was more than ever grateful to the impulse which had not allowed Guy to change his mind and come back with her. As soon as tea was over, Margaret and Monica went away to practise a duet; and in the manner of their going from the room Pauline felt the louring of the atmosphere.

Her mother began at once:

"Pauline, I'm surprized at your going into the Abbey with Guy."

"Well, it was really an accident. I mean it was because we wanted not to meet any of the Brydones, who were rushing at us from every side."

Pauline tried to laugh, but her mother looked down at the milk jug and flushed nearly to crimson in the embarrassment of something she was forcing herself to say.

"It's not merely going into the Abbey . . . no . . . not merely that . . . no, not merely going into the Abbey . . . but to let Guy make love to you like that is so vulgar. Pauline, it's the sort of way that servants behave when they're in love."

She sprang from the window-seat.

"Mother, what do you mean ?"

"Margaret and Monica saw you sitting on Guy's knee. In any case I would rather you never did that. In any case . . . yes . . . but in a place where people passing might have seen . . . yes, would have seen . . . oh, it was inexcusable . . . I shall have to make much stricter rules. . . ."

"Are you going to speak to Guy about this ?" Pauline asked. The house seemed to be whirling away like a leaf, such a shattering of her love were these words of her mother.

"How can I speak to Guy about it ?" Mrs. Grey demanded irritably. "How can I, Pauline ? It has nearly choked me to speak to you."

"I think Monica and Margaret are almost wicked," Pauline cried in flames. "They are trying to destroy everything. They are, they are. No, Mother, you shan't defend them. I knew they felt guilty when they went out of the room like that. How dare they put horrible thoughts in your mind ? How dare they ? They're cruel to me. And you're cruel to me. I don't understand what's happening to everybody. You'll make me hate you all, if you speak like that."

She rushed from the nursery and went first to the music-room where Margaret was sounding deep notes, hanging over her violoncello, and where Monica was playing one of those contained, somewhat frigid accompaniments.

"Margaret and Monica," said Pauline standing in the doorway. "You're never to dare to speak about me to

Mother as you must have spoken this afternoon. Because neither of you have any emotion but conceit and selfishness, you shall not be jealous of Guy and me. Margaret, you can have no heart. I shall write to Richard and tell him you're heartless. Don't smile down at your violoncello. You shall not rule me into being like yourself. Oh, I'll never play music with either of you again."

Then she left them and in her white room for an hour she listened hopelessly to the trolling wind.

November

GUY was very indignant when he heard from Pauline the sequel of her sisters' vigilance. That they should afterward have tried to atone with gentleness for what they had made her suffer did not avail with him. Monica and Margaret now impressed him with their unworldly beauty in a strange way, for they became sinister figures like the Lady Geraldine in Christabel, sly, malignant sylphs set in ambush to haunt the romantic path of his love. He was intensely aware that he ought not to resent their interference, but that he ought in fact to acknowledge the justice of it and by a stoical endeavour prove himself entitled to the cares of this long engagement. Actually Guy was enduring a violent jealousy, and illogically he began to declare how the others were jealous of him and Pauline The consciousness that he could not carry her off into immediate marriage galled him and he suffered all the pangs of an unmerited servitude. He and Pauline became the prisoners of tyrants who were urging them to accept the yoke of convention; the more he suffered, the more he knew in his heart that he was culpable, and the more culpable he recognized himself, the more he chafed against the burden of waiting. All the resolutions that with the announcement of their betrothal had seemed to sail before a prospering breeze now turned and beat up against adverse influences and were every moment in danger of being irreparably wrecked.

Naturally coincident with all the stress of a situation, that owing to the temperament of the Greys was never relieved by discussion, was a complete failure to advance on

the private road of his poetical ambition. All that he had written was seeming vain and bad: all that he was now trying to write deteriorated with every word painfully inscribed upon the cheerless empty page. He had conceived a set of eclogues that were to mark his contempt for the feverish incompetence of the modern school, whose ears had been corrupted by Wagner's filthy din; and all he could manage to achieve were seeming the banal inspirations of Mendelssohn. Guy was like an alchemist perpetually on the verge of discovering the stone that will transmute base metals to gold as he tried to find the secret by which such an one as Beethoven could purify with art the most violent emotions of humanity, yet always preserve their intrinsic value. He craved the secret which even the most obscure Elizabethans seemed to have possessed, that unearthly power of harmony which could fuse all baseness in a glittering song. Passion had never lost itself in arid decoration when they sang; nor yet had it ever betrayed itself with that impudently direct appeal these modern lyrists made, these shameless Rousseaus of verse. Yet he was as bad as any of them, for he was either like them when he tried to write his heart, or he expired in the mere sound of words like the degenerate ruck of the Caroline heirs to a great tradition. He was almost on the point of proclaiming his final failure, and if at that moment he could have received from his father the offer to come and teach small boys at Fox Hall, he would have gone.

And yet would he have gone? Could he abandon the delight of being with Pauline? The nearer he came to confessing his failure, the more he longed for her company. He was surely now in the midway of the thorny path of love, and whether he progressed or retreated he could not escape the spines. Well had he said to himself that night in May: '*La belle Dame sans mercy hath thee in thrall.*'

All the fire and fever of his present life on the outskirts

of a haunted country was for his imagination alone. However timidly his pen approached those dreams, they vanished; and whenever his pen betrayed him, Guy turned despairingly again to Pauline herself. These days without her were every day more unendurable. Once he had been content to talk about her to Mrs. Grey and her sisters, to listen to their praise of her: now every word they spoke wounded his pride. This madness of love could only feed itself in the very dungeons of his mind; and unless she were with him it did so horribly gorge itself that, if he had not swiftly seen her again, the madness would have broken the bars of its prison and ridden him like a hag.

It was when Guy had worked himself to this pitch of desire for the remedy of her sweet presence that Pauline was denied to him. He knew he must blame himself because, even after the warning of that afternoon in the Abbey, whenever they were together he would carry her away into the country, whence they would not return sometimes until night had fallen. Worse than that, by his now continuous withdrawal from the life of the Rectory he must have disquieted her family. He saw that they were becoming anxious about Pauline, but for that very reason he could not bring himself to mitigate a solitary doubt of theirs. Even to talk about her in the lightest way was now become an outrage upon the seclusion of their joint life. Such a conversation as that with Margaret about the silver photograph frame was now unimaginable. What right had anyone to know even what picture of Pauline burned upon his wall in the night-time? At first Pauline herself when the memory of the shock her mother's words had been to her died out, tried to justify the attitude of guardianship. She would explain to Guy how, ever since she could remember, her mother and sisters had treated her with this vigilance. They had, as she said, always so much adored her that it was natural for them to be unable at

once to relinquish entirely to someone else the complete possession of her. Yet Guy must not be jealous, because she told them none of her secrets now: indeed she was distressed at the thought of how far outside her confidence they reproachfully esteemed themselves. Her love for him had severely shaken the perfect unity of their immemorial life together, and he must be generous and understand how gradual would have to be their renunciation of her to him. Guy, however, would not allow Pauline to have regrets like this. The most trivial consideration of her family aroused his jealousy; and when Mrs. Grey said she thought it would be better if the old rule of only seeing Pauline twice a week came into force again, Guy was determined that Pauline should resent the step as bitterly as he resented it. All the time he was with her he would be lamenting the briefness of their permitted intercourse, and since the weather was now so wet that even they could not reasonably claim beneath such streaming skies the right to abscond into deserted country, November shed a gloom upon their love.

On the days when Guy did come to the Rectory, no one attempted to rob them of their privacy; they were always granted the nursery to themselves, and even sometimes they had tea there together, if visitors came, so that the privilege of their few hours should not be infringed. Nevertheless, the old sense of time and the world at their service was lost. The dull November dusk came swiftly on; and out in the passage the cuckoo with maddening reiteration proclaimed each fleeting fifteen minutes. Often Guy was asked to dinner, but the old pleasure was mostly gone, for in the evening he and Pauline were not expected to retire by themselves; and there was always an implied reproach for his influence when she refused to play her violin. Then there came a dreadful day, because some cousins had arrived to stay at the Rectory; for these two girls like everyone

else had been accustomed to adore Pauline, and so were determined to take an extreme interest in her engagement.

"We seem to have a ghastly lure for them," Guy groaned in exasperation, when Pauline had managed at last to secure the nursery for themselves.

"Guy, they're only staying a week."

"Well," he protested, "and for me to stay with you a week takes months of these miserable little hours we have. Oh, Pauline, I must see more of you."

Then back came the adoring cousins, and Guy felt that no torture he could imagine was bad enough for them. Their cordiality to him was so great that he had to be superficially pleasant; and, as smile after smile was wrung from him, by the end of the afternoon he felt sick with the agony his politeness had cost.

"Hurry and dress! hurry! hurry!" he begged Pauline, in a whisper when the gong sounded. "Let us at least have five minutes alone before dinner comes and I must go."

Pauline was scarcely five minutes in coming down again, but Guy counted each tick of the clock with desperate heartsickness.

"Oh, my darling, my darling," he said when she was held in the so dearly longed for, the so terribly brief embrace. "I cannot bear the torment of to-day."

She tried to soothe him; but Guy had reached the depths and this relief after such effort was almost too late.

"Pauline, listen," he said quickly. "You must come and say good-night to me in the garden. Do you hear? You must. You must. I shan't sleep unless you do. You must."

"Guy," she murmured, "I couldn't."

"You must. Promise . . . you must. Come down and say good-night to me on the lawn. I shall wait there all night. I shall wait . . ."

The cuckoo burst out to cry seven o'clock.

"You must come. You must come. Promise."

"Perhaps," she whispered faintly. Then she said she could not.

Guy went to the door.

"Remember, I have not kissed you good-night," he proclaimed solemnly. "And now I'm going. I shall wait from eleven o'clock, and stay all night until you have kissed me."

"Oh, but Guy . . ."

"To-night," he said. "You promise?"

"Guy, if I dare, if I dare."

There were footsteps in the passage. He fled across the room, kissed her momentarily and hurried out, saying good-bye to the cousins, as he passed them, with a kind of exultant affection.

Outside, the November night hung humid and oppressive; Guy looking up felt rain falling softly yet with gathering intensity, and he lingered a few moments in the drive held by the whispering blackness. Behind him, the lamplight of the Rectory windows seemed for the moment sad and unattainable and gave him the fancy he was drifting away from a friendly shore. Then suddenly he marched away along the drive, content; for the thought of 'to-night,' which latterly had often brought such a presentiment of loneliness, now sounded upon his imagination like the rapture of a nightingale.

Plashers Mead had never appeared so desirable as now when it was the prelude to such an enterprise as this of consecrating with a last embrace the rain and gloom of November. If he had any hesitation about the rightness or even, setting probity aside, about the prudence of such an action, he justified himself with romantic reasons; and if he was driven by conscience to an ultimate defence, he justified himself with the exceptional circumstances that gave him a sanction to accept from Pauline this sacrifice of her traditions. Impulses to consider what he was doing were easily dismissed: indeed before he reached his house

there was not one left. Inside, the warmth and comfort of Plashers Mead were additional incentives to prosecute his resolve; every gleaming book, the breathing of the dog upon the mat before the fire, the gentle purr of the lamp, all seemed to demand that voluptuous renunciation which would later urge him forth again into the night. That it would probably be raining was not to prove an obstacle: Pauline would be more sure to come if she thought he were standing outside in the rain. It was a second Eve of St. Agnes; and Guy went across to his shelf and took down Keats. He had come to the knights and ladies praying in their dumb oratories, when there was a knock at the front-door, and his mind leapt to the thought that Pauline might have sent a note by Birdwood to prevent his coming to-night. The knock sounded again, and as Miss Peasey was evidently too deeply immersed in The Pilgrim's Progress, her vespertine lectionary, to pay heed to visitors at this hour of nine o'clock, he must go down and open the door himself.

"Are we disturbing you?"

It was the voice of Brydone, and with Willsher in his wake he came into the hall.

"Charlie and I have made several shots to find you in, but of course we know you're a busy man nowadays."

"Go on upstairs, will you?" said Guy making a tremendous effort to appear hospitable. "I'll dig out the whisky."

He went along and shouted in Miss Peasey's ear what was wanted. She looked up as if it were Apollyon himself come to affront her holy abstraction.

"I think there's some left from that bottle we got in August. . . . I shall lay it on the mat," she told him.

Guy nodded encouragingly and went upstairs to join his guests.

"Well, I suppose you'll be soon having a missus in charge here," said Brydone heartily.

Willsher hummed Bachelor Boys as a contributory echo of the question.

"Oh, no, we're not getting married at once, you know," Guy explained.

"Well, you're quite right," Brydone declared heartily. "After all, being close at hand like this, you're not much likely to draw a blank in the lottery."

"Marriage is a lottery, isn't it ?" said Guy with polite sarcasm.

"Rather," sighed Willsher. "Terrific!"

"I suppose I shall have to be looking round preparatory to getting married in two or three years' time," Brydone added. "Well, you see, after Christmas I shall be thinking about my finals, and then I'm going to come in as the old man's partner. Country people like it best, if a doctor's married. No doubt about that, is there, Charlie ?"

The solicitor's son agreed it was indubitable.

"Of course if I had the cash to hang on in Harley Street for ten years as a specialist, it would be another matter. But I can't, so there it is."

Even this fellow had his dreams, Guy thought; even he would make acquaintance with thwarted ambitions.

"Been doing anything with a rod lately ?" asked Willsher, whose pastime, when he could not be standing in action on the river's bank, was always to steer a conversation in the direction of anglers' gossip.

"No, not lately," said Guy. "Though I knocked down a lot of apples with one last month."

"Ha-ha! that's good," Brydone ejaculated. "That's very good, Hazlewood. That's good, isn't it, Charlie ?"

"Awfully good," agreed the angler.

Their appreciation seemed perfectly genuine, and Guy was touched by the readiness of them to be entertained by his lame wit.

"I mustn't forget to tell the old man that," Brydone chuckled. "He's always digging at me over the fish. Done anything with a rod lately? I knocked down a lot of apples last month. Your governor will like that, Charlie!"

Guy heard the clink of a tray deposited cautiously on the floor of the passage outside. He allowed Miss Peasey time to retreat before he opened the door, because it was one of the clauses in her charter that she was never, as a lady-housekeeper, to be asked to bring a tray into a room when anyone but Guy was present. He hoped that after they had drunk, his visitors would depart; but alas, the unintended charm of his conversation seemed likely to prolong their stay.

"Rabelais," Brydone read slowly as he saw the volumes on the shelves. "That's a bit thick, isn't it?"

"In quantity or quality, do you mean?" asked Guy.

"I've heard that's the thickest book ever written," said Brydone.

"Do you read old French easily?" asked Guy.

"Oh, it's in old French, is it?" said Brydone in a disappointed voice. "That would biff me."

A silence fell upon the room, a silence that seemed to symbolize the 'biffing' of the doctor's son by old French. Willsher took the opportunity to steer the conversation back to fish, and ten o'clock struck in the middle of an argument between him and his friend over the merits of two artificial flies. Guy must be on the Rectory lawn by eleven o'clock, and he began to be anxious, so animated was the discussion, about the departure of these well-meaning intruders. He did not want to plunge straight from their company into the glorious darkness that would hold Pauline; and he eyed the volume of Keats lying face downward on the table, hoping he would be allowed to come back to the knights and ladies praying in their dumb oratories, while

he thought with a thrill of the moment when he should be able to read :

> *And they are gone ; ay, ages long ago*
> *These lovers fled away into the storm.*

" If you can't get a chub any other way, you can sometimes get him with a bit of bacon," Willsher was saying. " And I know a fellow who caught one of those woppers under Marston's Mill with a cherry. Fact, I assure you."

" I know a man at Oldbridge, who caught a four pounder with a bumble-bee."

" I caught a six pounder at Oxford with a mouse's head myself," Guy declared.

The friends looked at him in the admiration and envy with which anglers welcome a pleasant companionable sort of a lie. It was a bad move, for it seemed as if by that lie he had drawn closer the bonds of sympathy between himself and his guests. They visibly warmed to his company, for Brydone at once invited himself to another ' tot ' and was obviously settling down to a competitive talk about big fish ; while Willsher's first shyness turned to familiarity, so completely indeed that he asked if Guy would mind his moving the furniture in order to try to explain to that fathead Brydone the exact promontory of the Greenrush where he had caught thirty trout in an hour when the mayfly was up two years ago.

Half-past-ten struck from the church tower, and Guy became desperate. There was nothing he hated so much as asking people to go, which was one reason why he always discouraged them at the beginning ; but it really seemed as if he must bring himself to the point of asking Brydone and Willsher to leave him to his work. He decided to allow them until a quarter-to-eleven. The minutes dragged along, and when the quarter sounded Guy said he was sorry but that he was very much afraid he would have to work now.

"Right O," said Brydone. "We'll tootle off." But it took ten minutes to get them out of the house, and when at last they disappeared into the mazy garden Guy was in a fume of anxiety about his tryst. He could not now go round by Rectory Lane, as he had intended at first. No doubt Brydone and Willsher would stay talking half-an-hour on the bridge, for the rain had stopped and they had given the impression of having the night before them. In fact Brydone had once definitely announced that the night was still young. Yet in a way the fact of their nearness and of his having to avoid them added a zest to the adventure.

How dark it was and how heavily the trees dripped in the orchard. Guy pulled the canoe from the shed and dragged it squeaking over the wet grass: not even he in the exaltation of the moment was going to swim the Hellespont.

When he was in the canoe and driving it with silent strokes along the straight black stream; when the lantern was put out and the darkness was at first so thick that like the water it seemed to resist the sweep of his paddle, Guy could no longer imagine that Pauline would venture out. He became oppressed by the impenetrable and humid air, and he began to long for rain to fall as if it would reassure him that nature in such an annihilation of form was still alive. Now he had swung past the overhanging willows of the churchyard; his eyes grown accustomed to the darkness discovered against a vague sky the vague bulk of the church, and in a minute or two he could be sure that he was come to the Rectory paddock. He was wet to the knees and his feet, sagging in the grass, seemed to make a most prodigious noise with their gurgling.

Guy was too early when he crept over the lawn, for there were still lights in all the upper windows, and he withdrew to the plantation, where he waited in rapt patience while the branches dripped and pattered, dripped and

pattered ceaselessly. One by one the lights had faded out, but still he must not signal to Pauline. How should he after all make known to her his presence on that dark lawn? Scarcely would she perceive from her window his shadowy form. He must not even whisper; he must not strike a match. Suddenly a light crossed his vision and he started violently before he realized that it was only a glow-worm moving with laborious progress along the damp edge of the lawn. Black indeed was the hour when a glow-worm belated on this drear night of the year's decline could so alarm him. For a while he watched the creeping phosphorescence and wondered at it in kindly fellowship, thinking how like it was to a human lover, so small and solitary in this gigantic gloom. Then he began to pick it up and, as it moved across his hand and gave it with the wan fire a ghostly semblance, he resolved to signal with this lamp to Pauline.

Midnight crashed its tale from the belfry, and nowhere in the long house was there any light. There was nothing now in the world but himself and this glow-worm wandering across his hand. He moved nearer to the house and stood beneath Pauline's window; surely she was leaning out: surely that was her shadow tremulous on the inspissate air. Guy waved, and the pale light moving to and fro seemed to exact an answer, for something fell at his feet and by the glow-worm's melancholy radiance he read '*now*' on a piece of paper. Gratefully he set the insect down to vanish upon its own amorous path into the murk. Not a tree quivered, not a raindrop slipped from a blade of grass but Guy held out his arms to clasp his long awaited Pauline. The '*now*' prolonged its duration into hours, it seemed; and then when she did come she was in his arms before he knew by her step or by the rustle of her dress that she was coming. She was in his arms as though like a moth she had floated upon a flower.

Their good-night was kissed in a moment, and she was gone like a moth that cannot stay upon the flower it visits.

Guy waited until he thought he saw her leaning from her window once more. Then he drew close to the wall of the house and strained his eyes to catch the farewell of her hand. As he looked up, the rain began to fall again ; and in an ecstasy he glided back to Plashers Mead, adoring the drench of his clothes and the soft sighing of the rain.

ANOTHER WINTER

December

IN the first elation of having been able to prove to Guy how exclusively she loved him, Pauline had no misgivings about the effect upon herself of that dark descent into the garden. It was only when Guy, urging the success of what almost seemed disturbingly to state itself as an experiment, begged her to go farther and take the negligible risk of coming out with him on the river at night, that she began to doubt if she had acted well in yielding that first small favour. The problem, that she must leave herself to determine without a hint of its existence to anyone outside, stuck unresolved at the back of her conscience, whence in moments of depression it would, as it were, leap forth to assail her peace of mind. She was positive, however, that the precedent had been unwise from whatever point of view regarded, and for a while she resisted earnestly the arguments Guy evoked about the privileges conferred on lovers by the customary judgment of the world. Nevertheless in the end she did surrender anew to his persistence, and on two nights of dim December moonlight she escaped from the house and floated with him unhappily upon the dark stream, turning pale at every lean branch that stretched out from the bank, at every shadow, and at every sound of distant dogs' barking.

Guy would not understand the falseness of this pleasure and, treating with scorn her alarm, he used to invent excuses by which she would be able to account for the emptiness of the room in the event of her absence being discovered. The mere prospect of such deceit distressed Pauline, and when she realized that even already by doing what she had

done deceit had been set on foot, she told him she could not bear the self-reproach which followed. It was true, as she admitted, that there was really nothing to regret except the unhappiness the discovery of her action would bring to her family, but of course the chief effect of this was that Guy became even more jealous of her sisters' influence. The disaccord between him and them was making visible progress, and much of love's joy was being swallowed up in the sadness this brought to her. She wished now that she had said nothing about the rebuke she had earned for that unfortunate afternoon in the Abbey. Margaret and Monica had both tried hard ever since to atone for the part they played, and having forgiven them and accepted the justice of their point of view, Pauline was distressed that Guy should treat them now practically as avowed enemies. She might have known that happiness such as hers could not last, and she reproached herself for the many times she had triumphed in the thought of the superiority of their love to any other she had witnessed. She deserved this anxiety and this doubt as a punishment for the way in which she had often scoffed at the dulness of other people who were in love. Marriage, which at first had been only a delightful dream the remoteness of which did not matter, was now appearing the only remedy for the ills that were gathering round Guy and her. As soon as she had set her heart upon this panacea she began to watch Guy's work from the point of view of its subservience to that end. She was anxious that he should work particularly hard and she became very sensitive to any implication of laziness in the casual opinion that Margaret or Monica would sometimes express. Guy was obviously encouraged by the interest she took, and for a while in the new preoccupation of working together as it were for a common aim the strain of their restricted converse was allayed.

One day early in December Guy announced that really he

thought he had now enough poems to make a volume, news which roused Pauline to the greatest excitement and which on the same evening she triumphantly announced to her family at dinner.

"My dears, his book is finished! And, Father, he has translated some poems of that man—that Latin creature you gave him on his birthday."

"Propertius is difficult," said the Rector. "Very difficult."

"Oh, but I'm so glad he's difficult, because that will make it all the more valuable if Guy . . . or won't it? Oh, don't let me talk nonsense: but really, darlings, aren't you all glad that his book is finished?"

"We'll drink the poet's health," said the Rector.

"Oh, Father, I must kiss you . . . aren't you pleased Guy appreciated your present?"

"Now, Pauline, you're sweeping your napkin down on the floor. . . ."

"Oh, but Mother, I must kiss Francis for being so sweet."

"He promised to show me the poems," said Margaret. "But Guy doesn't like me any more."

"Oh, yes, Margaret, he does. Oh, Margaret, he really does. And if you say that, I shall have to break a secret. He's written two poems about you."

Margaret flushed.

"Has he? Well, he must certainly show them to me first or I shall veto the publication."

"Oh, darlings," Pauline cried. "I am happy to-night! The famousness of Guy presently . . . and oh, I forgot to tell you something so touching that happened this morning. What do you think? Miss Verney consulted me as to whether I thought it was time she began to wear caps."

"Guy ought to write a poem about that," said Monica.

"Oh, no, Monica, you're not to laugh at poor Miss

Verney. I must tell her to-morrow morning about Guy's book. She so appreciates greatness."

It was a delightful evening, and Pauline in her contentment felt that she was back in the heart of that old Rectory life, so far did the confidence in Guy's justification of himself enable her to leave behind the shadows of the past two months, and most of all those miserable escapades in the watery December moonlight.

"A book, dear me, how important," said Miss Verney, when next morning Pauline was telling her the news. "Quite an important event for Wychford, I'm sure. I must write to the Stores and order a copy at once . . . or perhaps, as a local celebrity . . . yes, I think, it would be kinder to patronize our Wychford stationer."

"But, Miss Verney, it's not published yet, you know. We expect it won't be published before March at the earliest."

"I don't think I ever met an author," said Miss Verney meditatively. "You see, my father being a sailor . . . really, an author in Wychford, . . . dear me, it's quite an important occasion."

Pauline thought she would devote the afternoon to writing the good news to Richard, and Margaret hearing of her intention, announced surprizingly that Richard was coming back in April for two or three months.

"Oh, Margaret, and you never told me."

"Well, I didn't think you took much interest in Richard nowadays. He asked what had happened to you."

"I am glad he's coming back, Margaret. But oh, do tell me if you are going to marry him."

Margaret would not answer, but Pauline, all of whose hopes were roseate to-day, decided that Margaret had really made up her mind at last, and she went upstairs full of penitence for her neglect of Richard, but determined to make up for it by the good news she would send both of herself and of him.

WYCHFORD RECTORY
OXON.

December.

My dear Richard,

I am sorry that I've not written to you for so long, but I know you'll forgive me, because I have to think about so many things. Margaret has just told me you are coming back in April. Be sure it is April, because my birthday is on the first of May, you know, and you must be in England for my birthday. Margaret looked very happy when she said you were coming home. Richard, I am sure that everything will be perfect. *Guy's book is finished, and perhaps it will be published in March. If it's published early in March, I will send you a copy so that you can read it on the steamer coming home. There are two poems about Margaret, who was very sympathetic with Guy over me! That's one of the reasons why I'm sure that everything will be perfect for you. Guy wants to meet you very much. He says he admires action. That's because I told him about your bridge. Your father and mother are always very sweet to us when we go and have tea with them. Miss Verney is going to wear caps! Birdwood asked if you would bring him back a Goorcha's—is that the way to spell it—a Goorcha's knife because Godbold won't believe something he told him. Birdwood said you were a grand young chap and were wasted out in India. Father won a prize at Vincent Square for a yellow gladiolus. It's been christened—now I've forgotten what, but after somebody who had a golden throat. Guy's dog is a lamb. A merry Christmas, and lots of love from*

Your loving

Pauline.

Pauline looked forward to Richard's return because she hoped that if Margaret married him her own marriage to Guy would begin to appear more feasible, it being at present

almost too difficult to imagine anything like marriage exploding upon the quietude of the Rectory. The return of Richard, from the moment she eyed it in relation to her own affairs, assumed an importance it had never possessed before when it was only an ideal of childish sentiment, and Pauline made of it a foundation on which she built towering hopes.

Guy, as soon as he had decided to publish his first volume, instantly acquired doubts about the prudence of the step, and he rather hurt Pauline's feelings by wanting Michael Fane to come and give him the support of his judgment.

" I told you I should never be enough," she said sadly.

He consoled her with various explanations of his reliance upon a friend's opinion, but he would not give up his idea of getting him and he wrote letter after letter until he was able to announce that for a week-end in mid-December Michael was actually pledged.

" And I do want you to like him," said Guy earnestly.

Pauline promised that of course she would like him, but in her heart she assured herself she never would. It was cerulean winter weather when the friend arrived, and Pauline who had latterly taken up the habit of often coming into the churchyard to talk for a while with Guy across the severing stream, abandoned the churchyard throughout that week-end. Guy was vexed by her withdrawal and vowed that in consequence all the pleasure of the visit had been spoilt.

" For I've been rushing in and out all the time to see if you were not in sight, and I'm often absolutely boorish to Fane, who by the way loves your Rectory bedroom so much."

" Has he condescended to let your book appear ? " asked Pauline.

" Oh, rather, he says that everything I've included is quite all right. In fact he's a much less severe critic than I am myself."

Pauline had made up her mind, if possible, to avoid a meeting with Michael, but on Monday she relented, and they were introduced to each other. The colloquy on that turquoise morning, when the earth smelt fresh and the grass in the orchard was so vernally green, did not help Pauline to know much about Michael Fane, save that he was not so tall as Guy and that somehow he gave the impression of regarding life more like a portrait by Vandyck than a human being. He was cold, she settled, and she, as usual shy and blushful, could only have seemed stupid to him.

That afternoon, when the disturbing friend had gone, Pauline and Guy went for a walk.

"He admired you tremendously."

"Did he ?" she made listless answer.

"He said you were a fairy's child, and he also said you really were a wild rose."

"What an exaggerated way of talking about somebody whom he has only seen for a moment."

"Pauline," said Guy, affectionately rallying her, "aren't you being rather naughty—rather wilful, really ? Didn't you like Michael ?"

"Guy, you can't expect me to know whether I liked him in a minute. He made me feel shyer than even most people do."

"Well, let's talk about the book instead," said Guy. "What colour shall the binding be ?"

"What colour did he suggest ?"

"I see you're determined to be horrid about my poor harmless Michael."

"Well, why must he be brought down like this to approve of your book ?"

"Oh, he has good taste, and besides he's interested in you and me."

"What did you tell him about us ?" Pauline asked sharply.

"Nothing, my dearest, nothing," said Guy, flinging his stick for Bob to chase over the furrows. "At least," he added turning and looking down at her with eyebrows arched in pretended despair of her unreasonableness, "I expect I bored him to death with singing your praises."

Still Pauline could not feel charitable, and still she could not smile at Guy.

"Ah, my rose," he said tenderly. "Why will you droop? Why will you care about people who cannot matter to us? My own Pauline, can't you see that I called in a third person because I dare not trust myself now. All the day long, all the night long you are my care. I'm so dreadfully anxious to justify myself: I long for assurance at every step: once I was self-confident, but I can't be self-confident any longer. Success is no responsibility in itself, but now . . ."

"It's my responsibility," cried Pauline melting to him. "Oh, forgive me for being jealous. Darling boy, it's just my foolish ignorance that makes me jealous of some one who can give you more than I."

"But no one can!" he vowed. "I only asked Michael's advice because you are too kind a judge. My success is of such desperate importance to us two. What would it have mattered before I met you? Now my failure would . . . oh, Pauline, failure is too horrible to think of."

"As if you could fail," she chided gently. "And if you did fail, I would almost be glad, because I would love you all the more."

"Pauline, would you?"

"Ah, no I wouldn't," she whispered. "Because I could not love you more that I do now."

The dog with a sigh dropped his stick: he was become accustomed to these interludes.

"Bob gives us up as hopeless," Guy laughed.

"I'm not a bit sympathetic, you jealous dog," she said. "Because you have your master all day long."

The next time Guy came to the Rectory, he brought with him the manuscript, so that Pauline could seal it for luck; and they sat in the nursery, while Guy for the last enumeration turned over the pages one by one.

"It represents so much," he said, "and it looks so little. My father will be rather surprized. I told him I should wait another year. I wonder if I ought to have waited."

"Oh, no," said Pauline. "Everything else is waiting and waiting. It makes me so happy to think of these pages flying away like birds."

"I hope they won't be like homing pigeons," said Guy. "It will be rather a blow if William Worrall rejects them."

"Oh, but how could he be so foolish."

"I don't think he will really," said Guy. "After all, a good many people have endorsed the first half, and I'm positive that what I've written here is better than that. I rather wish I'd finished the Eclogues though. Do you think perhaps I'd better wait after all?"

"Oh, no, Guy, don't wait."

So, very solicitously the poems were wrapped up, and when they were tied and sealed and the parcel lay addressed upon the table, Mrs. Grey with Monica and Margaret came in. They were so sympathetic about the possible adventures in sight for that parcel, and Guy was so much his rather self-conscious self that the original relation between him and the family seemed perfectly restored. Pauline was glad to belong to them, and in her pride of Guy's achievement she basked in their simple affection, thrilling to every word or look or gesture that confirmed her desire of the cherished accord between Guy and the others.

"Now I'm sure you'd both like to go and post Guy's poems," Mrs Grey exclaimed. "Yes . . . charming . . . to go and post them yourselves."

Pauline waited anxiously for a moment, because of late Guy had often seemed impatient of these permissions granted

to him by her mother, but this afternoon he was himself and full of the shy gratitude that made her wonder if indeed nearly a year could have flown by since their love had been declared. Dusk was falling when they reached the post-office.

"Will you register it, Mr. Hazlewood?" asked the post-mistress.

Guy nodded, and the parcel left their hands: in silence they watched it vanish into the company of other parcels that carried so much less: then back they came through the twilight to tea at the Rectory, both feeling as if the first really important step toward marriage had been taken.

"You see," said Guy, "if only these poems of mine are well received, my father must acknowledge my right to be here, and if he once admits that, what barrier can there be to our wedding?"

Pauline told him how much during the last month the distant prospect of their marriage had begun to weigh upon her, but now since that parcel had been left at the post-office, she said she would always talk of their wedding because that was such a much less remote word than marriage.

"Come out to-night," said Guy suddenly.

She put her hand on his arm.

"Guy, don't ask me again."

He was penitent at once, and full of promises never to ask her again to do anything that might cause an instant's remorse. They had reached the hall of the Rectory and in the shadows Pauline held him to her heart, suddenly caught in the flood of tenderness that a wife might have for a husband to whose faults she could be indulgent by the measure of his greater virtues kept, as it might be, for her alone.

January

GUY, as soon as he had sent off the poems to a publisher, was much less violently driven by the stress of love, which latterly had urged him along so wayward a course. He began to acquire a perspective and to lose some of that desperately clinging reliance upon present joys. The need of battling against an uncertain future had brought him to the pitch of madness at the thought of the hours of Pauline's company that must be wasted; but now when to his sanguine hopes marriage presented itself as at last within sight, sometimes even seeming as close as the fall of this new year, he was anxious to set Pauline upon more tranquil waters, lest she too should like himself be the prey of wild imaginations that might destroy utterly one untempered by any except the gentler emotions of a secluded life. Her mother and sisters, whom he had come to regard as hostile interpreters of convention, took on again their old features of kindliness and grace; and he was able to see without jealous torments how reasonable their attitude had been throughout, nay more than reasonable, how unworldly and noble-hearted it had been in confiding Pauline to the care of one who had so few pretensions to deserve her. He upbraided himself for having by his selfishness involved Pauline in the complexities of regrets for having done something against her judgment: and in this dreary rain of January, free from the burden of uncompleted labour, he now felt a more light-hearted assurance than he had known since the beginning of their love.

Bills came in by every post, but their ability to vex him had vanished in the promise his manuscript gave of a speedy defeat of all material difficulties. The reaction from the strain of decking his poems with the final touches that were to precede the trial of public judgment gave place to dreams. A dozen times Guy followed the manuscript step by step of its journey from the moment the insentient mailcart carried it away from Wychford to the moment when Mr. William Worrall threw a first casual glance to where it lay waiting for his perusal on the desk in the Covent Garden office. Guy saw the office-boy send off the formal postcard of acknowledgment that he had already received; and in his dream he rather pitied the youth for his unconsciousness of what a treasure he was acknowledging merely in the ordinary routine of a morning's work. Perhaps the packet would lie unopened for two or three days—in fact probably Mr. Worrall might not yet have resumed work, as they say, after a short Christmas vacation. Moreover when he came back to business, although at Guy's request for sponsors the poems had been vouched for by one or two reputed friends of the publisher with whom he was acquainted, he would no doubt still be inclined to postpone their examination. Then one morning he would almost inadvertently cut the string and glance idly at a page, and then . . .

At this point the author's mental visions varied. Sometimes Worrall would be so deeply transfixed by the revelation of a new planet swimming into ken that he would sit spellbound at his own good fortune, not emerging from a trance of delight until he sent a telegram inviting the poet to come post haste to town and discuss terms. In other dreams the publisher would distrust his own judgment and take the manuscript under his arm to a critic of taste, anxiously watching his face and as an expression of admiration gradually diffused itself knowing that his own wild

surmize had been true. There were many other variations of the first reception of the poems, but they all ended in the expenditure of sixpence on a telegram. Here the dream would amplify itself; and proofs, binding, paper, danced before Guy's vision; while soon afterward the first reviews were coming in. At this stage the poet's triumph assumed a hundred shapes and diversities, and ultimately he could never decide between a leader on his work in The Times headed A New Genius or an eulogy on the principal page of The Daily Mail that galloped neck and neck for a column alongside one of The Letters of an Englishman. The former would bestow the greater honour: the latter would be more profitable: therefore in moments of unbridled optimism he was apt to allot both proclamations to his fortune. With such an inauguration of fame the rest was easy dreaming. His father would take a train to Shipcot on the same morning: if he read The Times at breakfast he would catch the eleven o'clock from Galton and, travelling by way of Basingstoke, reach Shipcot by half-past-two. Practically one might dream that before tea he would have settled £300 a year on his son, so that the pleasant news could be announced to the Rectory that very afternoon. In that case he and Pauline could be married in April; and actually on her twenty-first birthday she would be his wife. They would not go to the Campagna this year, because these bills must be paid, unless his father, in an access of pride due to his having bought several more eulogies at bookstalls along the line, offered to pay all debts up to the day of his wedding; in which case they could go to the Campagna:

I wonder do you feel to-day
As I have felt since, hand in hand,
We sat down on the grass, to stray
In spirit better through the land,
This morn of Rome and May?

They would drive out from the city along the Appian Way and turn aside to sit among the ghostliness of innumerable grasses in those primal fields, the air of which would be full of the feathery seeds and the dry scents of that onrushing summer. There would be no thought of time and no need for words: there would merely be the two of them on a morn of Rome and May. And later in the warm afternoon they would drive home, coming back to the city's heart to eat their dinner within sound of the Roman fountains. Then all the night-time she would be his, not his in frightened gasps as when wintry England was forbidding all joy to their youth, but his endlessly, utterly, gloriously. They would travel farther south and perhaps come to that Parthenopean shore calling to him still now from the few days he had spent upon its silver heights and beside its azure waters. In his dream Pauline was leaning on his shoulder beneath an Aleppo pine, at the cliff's edge, Pauline whose alien freshness would bring a thought of England to sigh through its boughs, and a cooler world to the aromatic drouth. Theirs should be sirenian moons and dawns, and life would be this dream's perfect fulfilment. In what loggia, firefly-haunted, would he hold her? The desire with which the picture flamed upon his imagination was almost intolerable, and here he always brought her back to Plashers Mead on a June dusk. Then she could be conjured in this house, summoned in spirit here to this very room; and if they had loved Italy, how they would love England, as they walked across their meadows, husband and wife. With such visions Guy set on fire each January night that floated frorely into his bedroom, until one morning a letter arrived from Mr. William Worrall, that made his fingers tremble, as he broke the envelope and read the news:

217 Covent Garden, W.C.

January 6th.

Dear Sir,

I have looked at the poems you were kind enough to send for my consideration, and I shall be happy to hand them to a reader for his opinion. The reader's fee is one guinea. Should his opinion be favourable, I shall be glad to discuss terms with you.

Yours faithfully,

William Worrall.

Guy threw the letter down in a rage. He would almost have preferred a flat refusal to this request for money to enable some jaded hack to read his poems. The proposal appeared merely insolent, and he wrote curtly to Mr. William Worrall to demand the immediate return of his manuscript. But after all, if Worrall did not accept his work, who would? Money was an ulterior consideration when the great object was to receive such unanimous approval as would justify the apparent waste of time in which he had been indulging. The moment his father acknowledged the right he had to be confident, he in turn would try to show by following his father's advice that he was not the wrong-headed idler of his reputation. Perhaps he would send the guinea to Worrall. He tore up his first letter and wrote another in which a cheque was enclosed. Then he began to add up the counterfoils of his cheque book, a depressing operation that displayed an imminent financial crisis. He had overdrawn £5 last quarter. That left £32 10s. of the money paid in on December 21. The quarter's rent was £4 10s. That left £28. Miss Peasey's wages were in arrears, and he must pay her £4 10s. on the fifteenth of this month. That would leave £23 10s. and he must knock off 7s. 6d. for Bob's licence. About £3 had gone at Christmas and there were the books still to pay. £20

was not much for current expenses until next Lady Day. However, he decided that he could manage in Wychford, if he did not have to pay out money for Oxford debts, the creditors of which were pressing him harder each week.

		£	s.	d.
Lampard.	Books.	39	15	0
Harker.	Furniture.	17	18	0
Faucett.	Books.	22	16	6
Williamson.	Books.	13	19	0
Ambrose.	Books.	4	7	0
Brough.	Tobacco.	9	19	0
Clary.	Clothes.	44	4	0
Miscellaneous.	Books, Clothes, Stationery, Chemist, etc., etc. about £50			

A total of £202 18s. 6d. Practically he might say that £200 would clear everything. Yet was £50 enough to allow for those miscellaneous accounts ? Here for instance was a bill of £11 for boots and another of £14 for hats apparently, though how the deuce he could have spent all that on hats he did not know. It would be wiser to say that £250 was required to free himself from debt. Guy read through the tradesmen's letters and detected an universal impatience, for they all reminded him that not merely for fifteen months had they received nothing on account of large outstanding bills, but also they made it clear that behind reiterated demands and politeness strained to breaking-point stood darkly the law. That brute Ambrose, to whom after all he only owed £4 7s., was the most threatening. In fact he would obviously have to pay the ruffian in full. That left only £15 13s. for current expenses to Lady Day, or rather £14 12s., for by the way Worrall's guinea had been left out of the reckoning.

Guy wondered if he ought to get rid of Miss Peasey and manage for himself in future. Yet the housekeeper probably earned her wages by what she saved him, and if he relied on a woman who ' came in ' every morning, that meant feeding a family. It would be better to sell a few books. He might raise £50 that way. Ten pounds to both Lampard and Clary, and six fivers among the rest would postpone any violent pressure for a while. Guy at once began to choose the books with which he could most easily part. It was difficult to put aside as many as might be expected to raise £50, for his collection did not contain rarities, and it would be a sheer quantity of volumes, the extraction of which would horribly deplete his shelves, upon which he must rely.

The January rain dripped monotonously on the window-sills, while Guy dragged book after book from the shelves that for only fifteen months had known their company. They were a melancholy sight, when he had stacked on the floor as many books as he could bear to lose, each shelf looking as disreputable as a row of teeth after a fight. A hundred volumes were gone, scarcely a dozen of which had he sacrificed without a pang. But a hundred volumes in order to raise £50 must sell at an average of ten shillings apiece, and in the light of such a test of value he regarded dismayfully the victims. Precious though they were to him, he could not fairly estimate the price they would fetch at more than five shillings each. That meant the loss of at least a hundred more books. Guy felt sick at the prospect and looked miserably along the rows for the farther tribute of martyrs they must be forced to yield. With intense difficulty he gathered together another fifty, and then with a final effort came again for still another fifty. Here was the first edition of Swinburne's Essays and Studies. That must go, for it might count as ten shillings and therefore save a weaker brother. Rossetti's Poems in this edition of

1871 must go in order to save the complete works, for he could copy out the sonnet which was not reprinted in the later edition. Here was Payne's translation of Villon which could certainly go, for it would fetch at least fifteen shillings, and he still possessed that tattered little French edition at two francs. The collected Verlaine might as well go, and the Mallarmé with the Rops frontispiece: the six volumes would save others better loved. Besides, he was sick of French poetry, wretched stuff most of it. Yet, here was Hérédia and the Pleiad and de Vigny, all of whom were beloved exceptions. He must preserve too the Italians, (what a solace Leopardi had been), though here were a couple of Infernos, one of which could surely be sacrificed. He opened the first:

> *Amor, che a nullo amato amar perdona,*
> *Mi prese de! costui piacer si forte,*
> *Che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.*

The words were stained with the blue anemone to which he had likened Pauline's eyes that first day of their love's declaration. He opened the other:

> *Ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse,*
> *Quando leggemmo il disiato riso*
> *Esser baciato da cotanto amante,*
> *Questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,*
> *La bocca mi baciò tutto tremante:*

And in this volume the words were stained with a ragged robin which unnoticed had come back to Plashers Mead in his pocket that May eve and which when it fell out later he had pressed between those burning pages. It was doubtless the worst kind of sentiment, but the two books must go back upon their shelves, and never must they be lost, even if everything but Shakespeare went.

Guy put his hand to his forehead and found that it was

actually wet with the agony of what on this January afternoon he had been compelling himself to achieve. Each book before it was condemned he stroked fondly and smelt like incense the fragrant mustiness of the pages, since nearly every volume still commemorated either the pleasure of the moment when he had bought it or some occasion of reading equally good to recall. Then he covered the pile with a shroud of tattered stuff and wrote a letter offering them to the only bookseller in Oxford with whom he had never dealt. Two days later an assistant came over to inspect the booty.

"Well?" said Guy painfully, when the assistant put away his note-book and shot his cuffs forward.

"Well, Mr. Hazlewood, we can offer you £35 for that little lot."

Guy stammered a repetition of the disappointing sum.

"That's right, sir. And we don't really want them."

"But surely £50 . . ."

The assistant smiled in a superior way.

"We must *try* and make a *little* profit," he murmured.

"Oh, God, you'll do that. Why, I must have paid very nearly a hundred for them, and they were practically all second hand when I bought them."

The assistant shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sorry, sir, but in offering you £35, I'm offering too much as it is. We don't really want them, you see. They're not really any good to us."

"You're simply being damned charitable in fact," said Guy. "All right. Give me a cheque and take them away when you like . . . the sooner the better."

He could have kicked that pile of books he had with such hardship chosen; already they seemed to belong to this smart young assistant with the satin tie; and he began to hate this agglomeration which had cost him such agony and in the end had swindled him out of £15. The assistant

sat down and wrote a cheque for Guy, took his receipt and bowed himself out, saying that he would send for the books in the course of the week.

Through the rain Guy went for consolation to Pauline. He told her of his sacrifice and she with all she could give of exquisite compassion listened to his tale.

"But, Guy, my darling, why don't you borrow the money from Father? I am sure he'd be delighted to lend it to you."

Guy shook his head.

"It's impossible. My debts must be paid by myself. I wouldn't even borrow from Michael Fane. Dearest, don't look so sad. I would sell my soul for you. Kiss me. Kiss me. I care for nothing but your kisses. You must promise not to say a word of this to any one. Besides, it's no sacrifice to do anything that brings our marriage nearer by an inch. These debts are weighing me down. They stifle me. I am miserable too about the poems. I haven't told you yet. It's really a joke in one way. Yes, it's really funny. Worrall wrote to ask for a guinea before he read them. Now, don't you think there is something very particularly humorous in being charged a guinea by a reader? However, don't worry about that."

"How could he be so stupid?" she cried. "I hope you took them away from him."

"Oh, no. I sent the guinea. They must be published. Pauline, I must have done something soon or I shall go mad! Surely you see the funny side of his offer? I think the notion of my expecting to get five shillings apiece out of a lot of readers, and my only reader's getting a guinea out of me is funny. I think it's quite humorous."

"Nothing is funny to me that hurts you," Pauline murmured. "And I'm heartbroken about the books."

"Oh, when I'm rich I can buy plenty."

"But not the same books."

"That's mere sentiment," he laughed. "And the only sentiment I allow myself is in connection with things that you have sanctified."

Then he told her about the flowers pressed in the two volumes of Dante, both in that same fifth canto.

"And almost you know," Guy whispered, "I value most the ragged robin, because it commemorates the day you really began to love me."

"Ah, no," she protested. "Guy, don't say that. I always loved you, but I was shy before. I could not tell you. Sometimes, I wish I were shy now. It would make our love so much less of a strain."

"Is it a strain ?"

"Oh, sometimes," she cried nearly in tears, her light brown hair upon his shoulder. "Oh, yes, yes, Guy. I can't bear to feel . . . I'm frightened sometimes, and when Mother has been cross with me, I've not known what to do. Guy, you won't ever ask me to come out again at night ?"

"Not if it worries you afterward."

"Oh, yes, it has, it has. Guy, when shall we be married ?"

"This year. It shall be this year," he vowed. "Let us believe that, Pauline. You do believe that ?"

"Oh, Guy, I adore you so wildly. It must be this year. My darling, my darling, this year . . . let it be this year."

Guy doled out very carefully the £35 he had accumulated by the sale of his books. Lampard and Clary had to be content with £7 apiece. Five more creditors received £4, or rather one of them only £3 19s., so that the guinea left over could be put back into the current account for poetic justice. There was for the present nothing more to do but await the verdict of Worrall's reader, and in a fortnight Guy heard from the publisher to say this had been favourable enough to make Mr. Worrall wish to see him in order to discuss the matter of publication. Guy was much excited and rushed across to the Rectory in a festivity of

hopefulness. He had wired to say he would be in London next day, and all that evening the name of Worrall was lauded until round his unknown personality shone the aureole of a wise and benevolent saint. There seemed no limit to what so discerning a publisher might not do for Guy, and he and Pauline became to themselves and to her family the hero and heroine of such an adventure as never had been. In the course of the evening Guy had an opportunity of talking to Margaret, and for the first time for a long while he availed himself of it.

"Are you really going to talk to me then?" she asked in mock surprize.

"Margaret, I've been rather objectionable lately," said Guy, remembering with an access of penitence that it must be almost exactly a year ago that he and Margaret in that snowy weather had first talked about his love for Pauline.

"Well, I have thought that you were forgetting me," said Margaret. "I shall be sad if we are never going to be friends again."

"Oh, Margaret, we are friends now. I've been worried, and I thought that you had been rather unkind to Pauline."

"I haven't really."

"Of course not. It was absolutely my fault," Guy admitted. "Now that there seems a chance of our being married in less than ten years, I'm going to give up this continual exasperation in which I live nowadays. It's curious that my first impression of you all should have been as of a Mozart symphony, so tranquil and gay and self-contained and perfectly made did the Rectory seem. How clumsily I have plunged into that life," he sighed. "Really, Margaret, I feel sometimes like a wild beast that's escaped from a menagerie and got into a concert of chamber-music. Look here, you shall never have to grumble at me again. Now tell me, just to show that you've forgiven my detestable irruption . . . when Richard comes back . . ."

Margaret gave him her hand for a moment, and looked down.

"And you're happy?" he asked eagerly.

"I'm sure I shall be."

"Oh, you will be, you will be."

Pauline asked him afterward what he had said to Margaret that could have made her so particularly sweet, and when Guy whispered his discovery, Pauline declared that the one thing necessary to make this evening perfect had been just that knowledge.

"Guy, how clever of you to make her tell you what she will never tell us. You don't know how much it has worried me to feel that you were always angry with Margaret. How I've exaggerated everything! And what friends you really are, you dears!"

"I've never been angry with her except on your account."

"But you won't ever be again, because I'm so foolish. I'm really a sort of young Miss Verney."

They laughed at this idea of Pauline's, and soon it was time for Guy to go. He thought luxuriously as he walked up the drive how large a measure of good news he would bring back with him from London.

Guy was surprized to be kept waiting when he enquired for Mr. Worrall at three o'clock on the following afternoon. All the way up in the train he had thought so much about him and so kindlily that it seemed he must the very moment he entered the dusty Georgian antechamber shake his publisher warmly by the hand. He had pictured him really as looking out for his coming, almost as vividly indeed in his prefiguration of the scene as to behold Mr. Worrall's face pressed tight against a pane and thence disappearing to greet him from the step.

It was a shock to be invited to wait, and he repeated his name to the indifferent clerk a little insistently.

"Mr. Worrall will see you in a minute," the clerk repeated.

Guy looked at the few objects of interest in the outer office, at the original drawings of wrappers and frontispieces, at the signed photograph of a moderately distinguished poet of the 'nineties, at a depressing accumulation of still unsold volumes. The window was grimy, and the raindrops seemed from inside to smear it as tears smudge the face of a dirty child. The clerk pored over a ledger, and from the grey afternoon the cries of the porters in Covent Garden came drearily in. At last a bell sounded, and the clerk invited him 'to step this way,' lifting the counter and pointing up a narrow staircase beyond a glass door. Guy went up and at last entered Mr. Worrall's private office.

The publisher was a short fat man with a bald and curiously conical head, reminding Guy very much of a dentist in his manner. The poet sat down and immediately caught in his first survey Mr. William Worrall's caricature by Max Beerbohm. As a result of this observation Guy throughout the interview could only perceive Mr. Worrall as the caricaturist had perceived him, and like a shape in a dream his head all the time grew more and more conical, until it seemed as if it would soon bore a hole in the festooned ceiling.

"Well, Mr. Hazlewood," said the publisher referring as he spoke to Guy's card with what Guy thought was a rather unnecessary implication of oblivion. "Well, Mr. Hazlewood, my reader reports very favourably on your poems, and there seems no reason why I should not publish them."

Guy bowed.

"No reason at all," Mr. Worrall continued. Then making a gothic arch with his fingers and looking up at the ceiling, he added:

"Though, of course, there will be a risk. However, my reader's opinion was certainly favourable."

And so it ought to be, thought Guy, for a guinea.

"And I don't think," Mr. Worrall went on, "that in the circumstances we need be very much afraid. Have you any ideas about the price at which your sheaf, your little harvest is to be offered to the public?"

"Oh, I should leave that to you," said Guy hastily.

"Precisely," said the publisher. "Yes, I think perhaps we might say five shillings or . . . of course it *might* be done in paper in the Covent Garden Series of Modern English Poets. Yes, the reader speaks most highly of your work. You know the Covent Garden series of modern poets? In paper at half-a-crown net?"

"I should be very proud to appear in such a series," said Guy pleasantly. The series as a matter of fact was one that could do him no discredit.

"It's a charming idea, isn't it?" said Mr. Worrall, fondling one of the set that lay on his desk. "Every five volumes has its own floral emblem. We've done The Rose, The Lily, The Violet. Let me see, your poems are mostly about London, aren't they?"

"No, there isn't one about London," Guy pointed out rather sharply.

"No, precisely, then of course they would *not* come in The London Pride set which still has a vacancy. Perhaps The Cowslip? What does the reader say? Um, yes, pastoral. Precisely! Well, then why not let us decide that your poems shall be Number Three in The Cowslip set. Capital! I think you'd be wise to choose the Covent Garden series in paper. The cost of publication is really less in that series, and I have always chosen my poets so carefully that I can be sure the Press will pay attention to —er neophytes. That is a great advantage for a young writer, as you no doubt realize without my telling you?"

"The cost?" echoed Guy in a puzzled voice.

"It will run you in for about £30—as a guarantee of

course. The terms I suggest are simply a written agreement that you will guarantee £30 toward the cost. Your royalty to be ten per cent on the first thousand, twelve and a half on the next thousand and fifteen over two thousand. We might fairly say that in the event of selling a thousand you would have nothing to pay, but of course if you only sell twenty or thirty, you will have to—er—pay for your piping."

"And when should I have to produce this £30?" Guy asked.

"Well, I might ask for a cheque to be placed to my account on the day of publication; and then of course I should send in a written statement twice a year with the usual three months' margin for settlement."

"So that supposing my book came out in March?" Guy enquired.

"By the following November I should hope to have the pleasure of sending you back your £30 and a cheque on account of royalties," said the publisher briskly.

"They don't seem very good terms somehow," said Guy.

Mr. Worrall shrugged his shoulders, and his conical head grew more conical.

"You forget the advantage of being in the Covent Garden series of modern poets. However, don't, pray do not, entrust your manuscript to my pilotage unless you are perfectly satisfied. I have a good many poems to consider, you know."

"May I write within a week or so and give you my decision?" Guy asked.

"Naturally."

"Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Hazlewood. Clever fellow, isn't he?"

Guy had given a farewell glance at Max Beerbohm's caricature.

"Very clever," the poet fervently agreed.

Guy left Mr. William Worrall's office and wandered

dismally across Covent Garden, wondering where on earth he was going to be able to raise £30. He had intended to spend the night in town and look up some old friends, but foreseeing now the inevitable question 'What are you doing?' he felt he had not the heart to explain that at present he was debating the possibility of spending £30 in order to produce a book of poems. All the people whom he would have been glad to see had held such high hopes of him at Oxford, had prophesied for his career such prosperity; and now when after fifteen months he emerged from his retirement it was but to pay a man to include him in the Covent Garden series of modern poets. The rain came down faster, and a creeping fog made more inhospitable the dusk of London. He thought of a quick train somewhere about five o'clock, and in a sudden longing to be back in the country and to sleep, however dark and frore the January night that stretched between them, nearer to Pauline than here in this city of drizzled fog, he took a cab to Paddington.

During the railway journey Guy contemplated various plans to raise the money he wanted. He knew that his father at the cost of a long letter would probably have given him the sum: but supposing a triumph lay before him, all the sweets of it would have been robbed by paternal help. Moreover if the book were paid for thus, there would be a consequent suspicion of all favourable criticism: it would never seem a genuine book to his father, and the reviews would give him the impression of being the work of well-disposed amateurs or of personal friends. There was the alternative of borrowing the money from Michael Fane; and then as the train went clanging through the night Guy made up his mind to be under an obligation to nobody and to sacrifice all the rest of his books if necessary that this new book might be born.

When he was back at Plashers Mead, his resolution did not

weaken: coldly and unsentimentally he began to eviscerate the already mutilated library. At the end of his task he had stacked upon the floor five hundred volumes to be offered as a bargain to the bookseller who had bought the others. All that was left indeed were the cheapest and most ordinary editions of poets, one or two volumes of the greatest of all like Rabelais and Cervantes, and the eternally read and most companionable like Boswell and Gilbert White and Sir Thomas Browne. In the determination that had seized him he rejoiced in his bare shelves, so much exalted by the glories of abnegation that he began to despise himself in his former attitude as a trifler among books and to say to himself, as he looked at the volumes which had survived this heartless clearance, that now he was set on the great fairway of literature without any temptation to diverge up the narrow streams of personal taste. The bookseller's assistant was not at all eager for the proferred bargain, and in the end Guy could only manage to obtain the £30 and not, as he had hoped, another £10 towards his debts. Nevertheless he locked the cheque up in his desk with the satisfaction of a man who for the first time in his life earns money, and later on went across to tell Pauline the result of the visit to London.

There was a smell of frost in the air that afternoon, and the sharpness of the weather consorted well with Guy's mood, taking away the heavy sense of disappointment and giving him a sparkling hopefulness. He and Pauline went for a walk on Wychford down, and in the wintry cheer he would not allow her to be cast down at the loss of his books or to resent Worrall's reception of the poems.

"Everything is all right," he assured her. "The more we have to deny ourselves now, the greater will be my success when it comes. The law of compensation never fails. You and I are Davidsbündler marching against the Philistines. So be brave, my Pauline."

" I will try to be brave," she promised. " But it's harder for me because I'm doing nothing."

" Oh, nothing," said Guy. " Nothing except endow me with passion and ambition, with consolation . . . oh, nothing, you foolish one."

" Am I really all that to you ? "

" Forward," he shouted, hurling his stick in front of him and dragging Pauline at the heels of Bob across turf that was already beginning to crackle in the frost. Pauline could not resist his confidence, and when at last they had to turn round and leave a smoky orange sunset, they came home glowing to the Rectory, both in the highest spirits. Guy wrote to the publisher that night and announced his intention of accepting the " offer," a word which he could not resist framing with inverted commas in case the sarcastic shaft might pierce Mr. Worrall's hard and conical head.

Sitting back in his chair and thinking over his poems, all sorts of verbal improvements suggested themselves to Guy ; and he added a note asking for the manuscript to be sent back for a few corrections. He looked at his work with new eyes when it arrived, and bent with all the enthusiasm that fruition gave his pen upon reviewing each line for the hundredth time. He had enjoyed few things so well in his life as going to bed tired with the intense consideration of a rhyme and falling asleep in the ambition to reconsider it early next morning.

About ten days had passed since Guy sold the second lot of books, and the poems were now as good as he could make them until print should reveal numbers of fresh faults. He hoped that Worrall would hurry on with the printing in order to allow him plenty of time for an even more severe scrutiny ; and he wrote to suggest April as the month of publication, so anxious was he to have one specially bound copy to offer Pauline on her birthday.

On the very morning when the manuscript had been wrapped up and was ready to be sent off a disturbing letter arrived from Lampard, his favourite Oxford bookseller, to say that having made a purchase of books two or three days ago he had been surprized to find among them a large number of volumes with Mr. Hazlewood's name inscribed on the fly-leaves, for which Mr. Hazlewood had not yet paid him. He ventured to think it was only by an oversight that Mr. Hazlewood had not paid his long outstanding account before disposing of the books and in short he was anxious to know what Mr. Hazlewood intended to do about it. His bill, £32 15s., was enclosed. Guy wrote back to say that it was indeed a most unaccountable oversight on his part, but that he hoped in order to mark his sympathy with Mr. Lampard's point of view to send him another cheque very shortly, reminding the bookseller at the same time that he had scarcely three weeks ago sent him £7 on account. Mr. Lampard in his reply observed very plainly that Guy's letter was no reply at all and threatened politely to make matters rather unpleasant if the bill were not paid in full instantly. Guy tried once more a letter full of bland promises, and received in response a letter from Mr. Lampard's solicitor. The £30 intended for Mr. Worrall had to be sacrificed, and even £2 15s. had to be taken from his current account. Savagely he tore the paper from the manuscript, wrapped it up again and despatched it to another publisher. The bad luck of the Lampard business made him only the more resolute not to invoke aid from his father or anyone else. He was a prey to a perverse determination to do everything himself; but it was gloomy news that he had to tell Pauline that afternoon, and she broke down and cried in her disappointment.

February

PAULINE had been looking forward to the entrance of February with joyful remembrance of what last February had brought her; and that the anniversary of Guy's declaration of his love should be heralded by such a discomfiture of their plans was a shock. The renewal of his uncertainty about the fate of the poems destroyed the progress of a love that seemed to have come back to its old calm course, and brought back with all the added sharpness of absence the heartache and the apprehension. Pauline sat in the nursery window-seat and pondered dolefully the obstacles to happiness from which her mind, however hard it tried, could not escape. Most insistently of these obstacles Guy's debts haunted her, harassing and material responsibilities that in great uncouth battalions swept endlessly past. Even in the middle of the night she would wake gasping in an effort to escape from being stifled by their vastness pressing down upon her brain. The small presents Guy had given her burned through the darkness to reproach her: even the two rings goaded her for the extravagance they represented. It was useless for Guy to explain that his debts were a trifle, because the statement of a sum so large as £200 appalled her as much as if he had said £2000. She longed for a confidante whose sympathy she could exact for the incubus that possessed her lover; and fancying a disloyalty to him if she discussed his money affairs with her family, she could think of no one but Miss Verney to whom the burdensome secret might be entrusted.

"William had the same difficulty," sighed the old maid. "Really it seems as if money *is* the root of all evil. £200,

you say ? Oh, dear, how uncomfortable he must feel, poor young man."

"If only I could make some money, dear Miss Verney. But how could I ?"

"I used to ask myself that very question," said the old maid. "I used to ask myself just that very identical question. But there was never any satisfactory answer."

"It seems so dreadful that he should have sold nearly all his books and still have debts," moaned Pauline. "It seems so cruel. Ought I to give him up ?"

"Give him up," repeated Miss Verney, her cheeks becoming dead white at the question. "Oh, my dear, I don't think it could be right for you to give him up on account of debts. Patience seems to me the only remedy for your troubles, patience and constancy."

"No, you've misunderstood me," cried Pauline. "I'm afraid that I hamper him, that I spoil his work. If I gave him up, he would go away from Wychford and be free. Besides perhaps then his father would pay his debts. Miss Verney, Mr. Hazlewood didn't like me, and I think Guy has quarrelled with him over me. Oh, I'm the most miserable girl in England, and such a little time ago I was the happiest."

"Money," said Miss Verney slowly and seeming to address her cats rather than Pauline. "The root of all evil ! Yes, yes, it is. It's the root of all evil."

Pauline was a little heartened by Miss Verney's readiness to consider so seriously the monster that oppressed her thoughts ; yet it was disquieting to regard the old maid, whose life had been ruined by money and who all alone with cats stayed here in this small house at the top of Wychford town, the very image of unhappy love. It was disquieting to hear her reflections on the calamity of gold uttered like this to cats, and in a sudden dread of the future Pauline beheld herself talking in the same way a long time hence.

She shivered and bade Miss Verney farewell; and now to all the other woes that stood behind her in the shadows was added the vision of herself mumbling to cats in February dusks of the dim years ahead.

The idea of herself as the figure of an unhappy tale of love grew continuously more definite, and once she spoke of her dread to Guy, who was very angry.

"How can you encourage such morbid notions?" he protested. "You really must cultivate the power to resist them. People go mad by indulging their depression as you're doing."

"Perhaps I shall go mad," she whispered.

"Oh, for God's sake don't talk like that," he ejaculated in angry alarm; and Pauline, realizing how she had frightened him was sorry and went to the other extreme of high spirits.

"I thought we had agreed to wait ten years or twenty years, if necessary," said Guy. "And now after one year you are finding the strain too much. Why won't you have confidence in me? It's unfortunate about Worrall, I admit. But there are plenty of other publishers."

He mentioned names one after another, but to Pauline they were the names of stone idols that stared unresponsively at her lover's poems.

"If we had only done what Mother wanted and not seen so much of each other," she lamented.

Guy's disposal of her vain fears was without effect, for his eloquence could not contend with these deepening regrets; and as fast as he threw down the material obstacles to their happiness Pauline saw them maddeningly rise again in the path before them, visible shapes of ill omen, grotesquely irrepressible. Guy used to asseverate that when Spring was really come she would lose all these morbid fancies, and with his perpetual ascription to wintry gloom of all the presentiments of woe that flocked round their

intercourse, Pauline did begin to fancy that, when the trees were green, he and she would rejoice as of old in their love. The knowledge that Spring could not linger always was the only consoling certainty she now possessed, and from the window-seat she greeted with a passionate welcome each dusky azure minute that on these lengthening eves was robbed from night. The blackbirds sang to her now more personally, these sombre-suited heralds who had never before seemed to proclaim so audaciously masterful Spring; and when the young moon cowered among the ragged clouds of a rainy golden sky and the last bird slipped like a shadow into the rhododendrons, such airs and whispers of April would steal through the open window. Every day too there were flowery tokens of hope and in sheltered corners of the garden the primroses came out one by one, an imperceptible assemblage like the birth of stars in the luminous green West. This grey-eyed virginal month had now such memories of the last progress it made through her life that Pauline could not help imputing to the season a sentimental participation in her life: there was a poignancy in the reopening of those blue Greek anemones which Guy, a year ago, had likened to her eyes, a poignancy that might have been present if the flowers had been consciously reminding her of vanished delights. Yet it was unreasonable to encourage such an emotion, or did she indeed, as sometimes was half whispered to her inmost soul, regret the slightest bit everything since that day of the anemones?

It was one evening toward the end of the month that Monica joined her and walked up and down the edge of the lawn where in the grass a drift of purple crocuses had lately been flaming for her solitary adoration.

"In a way," said Pauline, "they are my favourite flowers of all. I don't think there is any thrill quite like the first crocus bud. It seems to me that as far as I can look back,

oh, Monica, ever so far, that always the moment I've seen my crocuses budding winter seems to fly away."

"I remember your looking for them when you were tiny," Monica agreed. "I can see you now kneeling down, and the mud on your knees, and your eyes screwed up when you told me about your discovery."

They talked for a while of childish days, each capping the other's evocation of those hours that now in retrospect appeared like the gay pictures of an old book long ago lost, and found again on an idle afternoon. They talked too of Margaret and whether she would marry Richard; and presently, without the obvious transition that would have made her silent, Pauline found that they were discussing Guy and herself.

"I notice he doesn't come to church now so much as he did," said Monica.

Pauline was startled by an abrupt statement of something which among all the other worries she had never defined to herself, but which now that Monica revealed its shape she knew had occupied a dark corner at the back of her mind more threatening than any of the rest. Of course she began at once to make excuses for Guy, but her sister, who brought to religion the same scrupulous temperament she gave to her music, would not admit their validity.

"Don't you ever ask him why he hasn't been?" she persisted.

"Oh, of course not. Why, I couldn't, Monica. I should never feel . . . oh, no, Monica, it would really be impossible for me to talk to Guy about his faith."

"His faith seems rather to have frozen lately," said Monica.

"He's been upset and disappointed."

"All the more reason for going to church," Monica argued.

"Yes, for you, darling, or for me; but Guy may be different."

"There's no room for moods in one's religious duties. The artistic temperament is not provided for."

That serene and nun-like conviction of tone made Pauline feel a little rebellious, and yet in its corroboration of her own uneasiness she could not laugh it aside.

"Well, even if there's no excuse for him and even supposing it made me dreadfully anxious," she affirmed, "I still wouldn't say a word to him."

"Does he know you go to Confession?"

Pauline blushed. Monica was like a Roman Catholic in the matter-of-fact way in which she alluded to something that for Pauline pierced such sanctities as could scarcely even be mentioned by herself to her own soul.

"Monica, you don't really think that I ought to speak of that," she stammered. Not even to her sister could she bring herself to utter the sacramental word.

"I certainly think you should," said Monica. "When you and Guy are married it would be terrible if your duties were to be the cause of a disagreement. Why, he might even persuade you to give up going to Confession."

"Darling Monica," said Pauline nervously, "I'd rather you didn't talk about this any more. You see, you're so much better than I and you've thought so much more deeply than I have about religion. I don't think I shall ever be able to make my faith so narrow a . . . so strict a rule as yours is. No, please, Monica, don't let us talk about this subject any more."

"I only mentioned it because I'm afraid that with your beautiful nature you will be too merciful to that Guy of yours."

"Oh, and I'd really rather you didn't say my nature was beautiful," Pauline protested. "Truthfully, Monica, darling, it's a very ugly nature indeed, and I'm afraid it's getting uglier every day."

Her sister's cloistral smile flickered upon the scene like the wan February sunlight.

" I do hope Guy really appreciates you," was what she said.

" See how the sparrows have pulled the crocuses into ribbons," Pauline exclaimed. And so that Monica could not talk to her any more, she hailed her father, who was wandering along toward the house on the other side of the lawn. When he sauntered across to them she pointed out the destructiveness of the sparrows.

" Ah, well, my dear," he chuckled, " most florists are worse."

" Perhaps *I'm* a florist," Monica whispered, " and Guy may be only a mischievous sparrow."

Pauline smiled at Monica and took her arm gratefully and affectionately.

" We shall have all the daffs gone before we know where we are," said the Rector. " Maximus is out under the oaks. And King Alfred is just going to turn down his buds."

" Dear King Alfred," said Pauline. " How glad I shall be to say good-morning to him again."

Yes, all the daffodils would soon be here and then gone; and beyond this austere afternoon already she could fancy a smell of March winds.

After Monica's question it was no longer possible for Pauline when she was alone to avoid facing the problem of Guy's attitude toward religion. The repression of her anxiety on this point had only increased the force of it when it was set free like this to compete with and in fact overshadow all other cares. Looking back to her earliest thoughts of the world as it would one day affect herself, she remembered how, if she had ever imagined someone in love with her, she had always created a figure whose faith would be an eternal and joyful contemplation. She had never invented for herself a marriage with someone merely good-

looking or rich or endowed with any of the romantic attributes that young girls were supposed to award their ideals, as her cousins would say, of men. When Guy entered her life, the only gift he brought her for which she was at all prepared was the conviction of his faith. This indeed was his spiritual and mental reality for her: the rest of him was a figment, a dream that might pass suddenly away. The visit of his father had given her a more clearly defined assurance of his existence on earth, but his faith had been the heart of the immortal substance of her love for Guy. The endlessness of their union was always present in her thoughts, the ultimate consolation of whatever delays they might be called upon to endure. Very often, even at the beginning of the engagement, Guy had frightened her sometimes by his indifference to immortality, sometimes by his harping upon the swift flight of youth, sometimes by his manifest indulgence of her creed. All these doubts, however, of his sympathy were allayed by his apparently deliberate pleasure in worship. She was angry with herself then for her mistrust of him, and her contentment had been perfect when in church he knelt beside her on that birthday of his, that day of their avowed betrothal, and on all those other occasions when he had given an outward proof of his faith. Now as she looked back on his absence from church lately, she could not but wonder whether all his attendance had not been a kind of fair-weather spoiling of her that could not withstand the least stress of worldly circumstance. She began to torment herself over every light remark that might have been a sneer and to look forward dreadfully to Guy's abrupt declaration of a profound disbelief in everything she held most sacred. His cleverness, as he hated her to call it, intervened and seemed to wrench them asunder; and the more she pondered his behaviour, the more she became convinced that all the time Guy's religion had merely been Guy's kindness. This discovery was not to

make her love him less; but it did throw upon her the responsibility of the knowledge that he had nothing within himself to fortify his soul, should mishap destroy his worldly confidence.

For a long time Pauline lay awake in the darkness, fretting herself on account of Guy's resourcelessness of spirit, and to her imagination concentrated on this regard of him every hour seemed to make his solitude more terrible. Of her own religion she did not think, and Monica's anxiety about their agreement after marriage was without the least hint of danger. The possibility of anyone's, even Guy's influencing her own faith was inconceivable; nor was she at all occupied with her own disappointment at not finding Guy constant to her belief in him. Pauline's one grief was for him, that now when things were going badly he should be without spiritual hope. Suddenly her warm bed seemed to her wrong and luxurious in comparison with the chill darkness she imagined about Guy's soul at this moment. Impulsively she threw back the sheets and knelt down beside the bed to pray for his peace. So vividly was she conscious of the need for prayer that she was carried to undreamed of heights of supplication, to strange summits whereon it seemed that if she could not pray she would never know how to pray again. Ordinarily her devotions had been but a beautiful and simple end or beginning of the day: they were associated with the early warmth of the sunlight or with the gentle flutters of roosting birds: they were the comforting and tangible pledges of a childhood not yet utterly departed. Now the fires and ecstasies of a more searching faith had seized Pauline. No longer did there pass before her eyes a procession of gay-habited saints, glad celestial creatures that smiled down upon her from a paradise not much farther away than the Rectory garden: no longer did she find herself surrounded by the well-loved figures who when death took her to them would hold out

their arms in actual welcome and whom she would recognize one by one. To-night these visions were uncapturable, and beyond the darkness they had forsaken stretched a terrifying void and beyond the void was nothing but light that seemed to have the power of thinking : 'I am Truth !' A speck in that void she saw Guy spinning away from her, and it seemed that unless she prayed he would be spun irremediably out of her consciousness. It seemed that the fierceness of her prayer was like the fierceness of a flame that was granted the power to sustain him, for when sometimes the tongues of fire languished Guy would sink so far that only by summoning fresh force from the light beyond could she bring him back. Gradually, however, her power was waning and with whatever desperate force she prayed he could never be brought back to the point from which he had last slipped. He was spinning away into a horror of blackness. . . .

"O Holy Ghost, save him," she cried. Then Pauline fainted, and wondered to find herself lying upon the cold floor when she woke as from a dream. Yet it was not like the gasping rescue of oneself from a nightmare, for she lay awake a long while afterward in peace, and she slept as if upon a victory and very early in the morning went to church.

The days when the thrushes sang mattins were come and all the way she heard freshets of holy song pouring down through the air. She and her family always knelt apart from one another, and this morning Pauline chose a place hidden from the others, a place where she could lean her cheek against a pillar and be soothed by the cool touch of the stone like the assurance of unfathomable and maternal love. Now to her calm spirit returned the vision of those happy heavenly creatures, the bright-suited and intimate companions of her childhood. They welcomed her this morning and thronged about her downcast eyes with many angels too that like Tobit's angel walked by her side. Only

her father's mellow voice spoke from the chancel of earth, and even he in his violet chasuble took his place among the saints, and when she went up to the altar Heaven was once again very near to her.

In the morning coolness it was almost impossible to believe that last night she had fainted, and she began to believe the whole experience had been a dream's agony. However, whether it were or not, she had made up her mind to ask Guy a direct question this afternoon. If as she feared, he was feeling hostile to religion she would accept the warning of the night and give all her determination to prayer for his faith to return.

When they were together, it was for a long time impossible to begin the subject, and it was not until Guy asked what was making her so abstracted that Pauline could ask why he never came to church any more.

In the pause before he answered, she suffered anew the torment of that struggle in the darkness.

"Does it worry you when I don't come?" he asked.

"Well, yes, it does rather."

"Then of course I will come," said Guy at once.

Now this was exactly the reason for which least of all she wanted him to come, and a trace of her mortification may have been visible, because he asked immediately if that did not please her.

"Guy, don't you want to come to church? You used to come happily, didn't you?"

"I think I came chiefly to be near you," he said.

"That does make me so unhappy. I'd almost rather you came out of politeness to Father."

"Well, that was another reason," Guy admitted.

"And you never came because you wanted to?" she asked miserably.

"Of course I wanted to."

"But because you believed?"

"In what ?"

"Oh, Guy, don't be so cruel. Don't you believe in anything ?"

"I believe in you," he said. "Pauline, I believe in you so passionately that when I am with you I believe in what you believe."

"Then you haven't any faith ?"

"I want to have it," said Guy. "If God won't condescend to give it to me . . ." he broke off with a shrug.

"But religion is either true, or it isn't true, and if it isn't true, why do you encourage me in lies ?" she demanded with desperate entreaty.

"I'm ready to believe," he said.

"How can you expect to have faith if your reason for it is merely to sit next me in church ?" she asked bitterly.

"Now, I think it's you who are being cruel," said Guy.

"I don't care. I don't care if I am cruel. You'll break my heart."

"Good God," Guy exclaimed. "Haven't I enough to torment me without religion appearing upon the scene ? If you want me to hate it . . . no, Pauline, I'm sorry . . . you mustn't think that I don't long to have your faith. If I only could . . . oh, Pauline, Pauline."

She yielded to his consolation, and when he told her of the poems sent back almost by return of post from the second publisher she must open wide her compassionate arms. Nevertheless he had somehow maltreated their love ; and Pauline was aware of a wild effort to prepare for sorrow whether near at hand or still far off she did not know, but she seemed to hear it like a wind rising at sunset.

ANOTHER SPRING

March

WHEN the poems were returned by three publishers within the first fortnight of March, Guy was inclined to surrender his vocation and to think about such regular work as would banish the reproach he began to fancy was now perceptible at the back of everybody's eyes. The weather was abominably cold, and even Plashers Mead itself was no longer the embodiment of the old enthusiasm. Already in order to pay current expenses he was drawing upon the next quarter, and the combination of tradesmen's books with icy draughts curling through the house produced an atmosphere of perpetual exasperation. It always seemed to be coldest on Monday morning and Miss Peasey *would* breathe over his shoulder while he was adding up the bills.

"We apparently live on butter," he grumbled.

"Oh, no, it was really lamb you had yesterday," the housekeeper maintained irrelevantly.

"I said we apparently live on butter," Guy shouted.

Then of course Miss Peasey *would* poke her veiny nose right down into the book, while the draught blew her hair about and unpleasantly tickled his cheek.

"It's the best butter," she said sorrowfully at last.

"But my watch is quite all right."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I made an allusion to Alice in Wonderland," he shouted.

Miss Peasey retired from the room in dudgeon, and Guy wasted ten minutes in examining various theories on what his

housekeeper could have thought he meant by his last remark. Finally he wrote off to a friend of his, an ardent young Radical peer with whom he had shared rooms at Oxford.

PLASHERS MEAD, WYCHFORD, OXON.

March 15.

Dear Com,

Why the dickens haven't you written to me for such ages? I'm going to chuck this place. Haven't you got any scheme on hand for teaching the democracy to find out the uselessness of your order? Why not a new critical weekly, with me as bondslave-in-chief? Or doesn't one of your National Liberals want a bright young fellow to dot his i's and pick up his h's? For £250 a year I'll serve any of them, write his speeches, interview his constituents or even teach his cubs to prey on the body politic like Father Lion himself. Seriously though, if you hear of anything, do think of me.

Yours ever

G. H.

Comeragh wrote back at once:

420 BROOK STREET, W.

March 16.

Dear old Guy,

If you will bury yourself like a misanthropic badger, you can't expect to be written to by every post. Oddly enough there has been some talk of starting a new paper; at least it isn't really very odd because the subject is mooted three times a day in the advanced political circles round which I revolve. However, just at present the scheme is in abeyance. Never mind, I'll fetch you out of your earth at the first excuse that offers itself. Do you ever go in and see the Balliol people? My young brother's up now, you know. Ask him over to lunch some day. He's a shining light of Tory Democracy and is going

to preserve or I suppose I ought to say conserve the honour of our family. When are your poems coming out? I heard from Tom Anstruther the other day. He seems rather hurt that an attaché at Madrid is not given an opportunity of adjusting or upsetting the balance of power in Europe. I'll try to get down for a week-end, but I'm betraying my order by voting against an obscurantist majority whenever I can, and plotting hard against the liberties of landowners when I'm not voting. However, when the House flies away to search for summer I'll drop out of the flock and perch a while on your roof. One thing I will promise, which is that when I'm Prime Minister you shall be offered the Laurel at £200 a year.

Yours ever

Com.

It was jolly to hear from Comeragh like this, and the letter opened for Guy a prospect of something that, when he came to think about it, appeared very much like a retreat. He realized abruptly that the strain of the last two months had been playing upon his nerves to such an extent that the notion of leaving Wychford was no longer very distasteful. The realization of his potential apostasy came with rather a shock, and he felt that he ought somehow to atone to Pauline for the disloyalty toward her his attitude seemed to involve. He began to go to church again in a desperate endeavour to pursue the phantom that she called faith, but this very endeavour only made more apparent the vital difference in their relations with life. She always had for his attempts to capture something worth while for himself in religion a kind of questioning anxiety which was faintly irritating; and though he always pushed the problem hastily out of sight, the fact that he could now be irritated by her was dolefully significant.

All through this month of maddening East wind Guy felt that he stood upon the verge of a catastrophe, and the

despatch of the poems which at first had done so much to help matters along was now only another source of vexation. Formerly he had always possessed the refuge of work, but in this perpetual uncertainty he could not settle down to anything fresh, and the expectation every morning of his poems being once again rejected was a handicap to the whole day. Partly to plunge himself into a reaction and partly to avoid and even to crush their spiritual divergence Guy always made love passionately to Pauline during these days. He was aware that she was terribly tried by this, but the knowledge made him more selfishly passionate. A sort of brutality had entered into their relation which Guy hated, but to which in these circumstances that made him feverishly glad to wound her he allowed more liberty every day. The merely physical side of this struggle between them was of course accentuated by the gag placed upon discussion. He would not give her the chance of saying why she feared his kisses, and he took an unfair advantage of the conviction that Pauline would never declare a reason until he demanded one. He was horribly conscious of abusing her love for him, and the more he was aware of that, the more brutal he showed himself until sometimes he used to wonder in dismay if at the back of his mind the impulse to destroy his love altogether had not been born.

Easter was approaching, and Pauline went to Oxford for a week to get summer clothes. When she came back, Guy found her attitude changed. She was remote, almost evasive, and at the back of her tenderest glance was now a wistful appeal that perplexed his ardour.

"I feel you don't want me to kiss you," he said reproachfully. "What has happened? Why have you come back from Oxford so cold? What has happened to you, Pauline?"

Her eyes took fire, melted into tenderness, flamed once more, and then were quenched in rising tears.

The voice in which she answered him seemed to come from another world.

"Guy, I am not cold . . . I'm not cold enough. . . ."

She flung herself away from his gesture of endearment and buried her cheeks in the cushion of the faded old settee. A wild calm had fallen upon the room as if like the atmosphere before a thunderstorm it could register a warning of the emotional tempest at hand. The books, the furniture, the very pattern of birds and daisies upon the wall stood out sharply, almost luridly it seemed: the cuckoo from the passage called the hour in notes of alarm as if a storm-cock were sweeping up to cover from dangerous open country.

"What do you mean?" Guy asked. He knew that he was carrying the situation between Pauline and himself farther along than he had ever taken it since the night they met. Yet nothing could have stopped his course at this moment and, if the end should ruin his life, he would persist.

"What do you mean?" he repeated.

"Don't ask me," she sobbed. "It's cruel to ask me."

"You mean your mother . . ." he began.

"No, no, it's myself, myself."

"My dearest, if it's only yourself, you need not be afraid. Why, you're so adorable. . . ."

Pauline seemed to cry out at the wound he had given her, and Guy started back afraid for an instant of what he was provoking.

"Don't treat me like a stupid little girl that petting can cure. I'm not adorable, I'm bad . . . I'm . . . oh, Guy, I am so unhappy!"

"What do you mean by 'bad'?" he asked. "You talk as if we were . . . really, darling, you don't grasp life at all."

"Guy," she said turning to him with fierce earnestness. "Don't persuade me I've done nothing. I have. I ought

not. I've known that all the time. If you don't want me to be miserable for the rest of my life, you mustn't persuade me. I've been so weak. . . ."

He was annoyed at the exaggeration in her words and perplexed by her violence.

"Anybody would think, you know," he told her, "that we had behaved terribly."

"We have. We have."

Her mouth was drawn with pain : her eyes were wild.

"But we've not," Guy contradicted, mustering desperately all the forces of normality to allay Pauline's overstrained ideas. "We've not," he repeated. "You don't understand, darling Pauline, that when you talk like that you give the impression of something that is unimaginable of you. It's dreadful really to have to talk about this, but it's better that we should discuss it than that you should torture yourself needlessly like this."

"It's not what we've done so much," she said. "It's what you've made me think about you."

Guy laughed rather miserably.

"That seems a very trifling reason for so much . . . well, you know, it's very nearly hysteria."

"To you, perhaps," she retorted bitterly. "To me it's like madness."

"I can't understand these morbid fancies of yours. What have you been doing in Oxford ? Ah, I know," he shouted in a rage of sudden divination. "You've been talking to a priest. . . . Oh, if I could burn every interfering scoundrel who . . ." The scene swept over him, choking the words in his throat with indignant impotent jealousy. "You've been to Confession. And what good have you got from it, but lies, lies ?"

"I've always been to Confession," Pauline answered coldly.

In a flash Guy visualized her religious life as one long

creeping toward a gloomy Confessional where lurked a smooth-faced priest who poured his poison into her ears.

"You shall go no more," he vowed. "What right have you to drag the holiness of love in the mud of a priest's mind?"

"You don't know how stupidly you're talking," said Pauline. "You say I exaggerate. You don't know how much you are exaggerating. You don't understand."

"I thought you wanted me to have faith! How can I have faith when I hear of priests degrading our love. What right had you to go to a priest? What does he know of you or me? What has he suffered? What does he understand? Why do you listen to him and pay no heed to me? What did you say?"

Pauline looked at him in silence.

"What did you say?" he repeated angrily. He was caring for nothing at that moment but to tear from her the history of the scene that made a furnace of his brain. "He must have tried to put the idea into your head that you've been doing wrong. I say you have done nothing wrong. I suppose you told him you came out at night with me on the river and I suppose he concluded from that . . . oh, Pauline, I cannot let you be a prey to the mind of a priest. You don't realize what it means to me. You don't realize the raging jealousy it rouses."

"Guy," she moaned, "love is too much for me. I can't bear the uncertainty. Your debts . . . the sending back of your poems . . . the fear that we shall never be married . . . the doubts . . . the thought that I've deceived my family . . . the misery I bring to you because I can't think everything is right. . . ."

"I don't want you always to agree with me. I've promised never to ask you again to come out with me at night. I'll even promise never to kiss you again, until we are married. But you must promise me never again to go to Confession."

"I can't give up what I believe is right," she said.

"Then I won't give up what I believe is right."

He strained her to him and kissed her lips so closely that they were white instead of red. Then he went from her in an impulse to let her if she would break off the engagement. If he had stayed he must have blasphemed the religion which was soiling with its murk their love. He must have hurt her so deeply that he would have compelled her to bid him never come back. It was for her now, the responsibility of going on, and she should find what religion would do for her when she was left alone to battle with the infamous suggestions the fiction was giving to her mind. She should find that beside his love religion was nothing, that the folly would topple down and betray her at this very moment. When next he saw her, she would have forgotten her priests and their mummery: she would think only of him and live only for him.

"Blow, you damned wind," he shouted to the brilliant and tranquil March day. "Blow, blow, can't you? You've blown all these days and now when I want you in my face, you lie still."

But the weather stayed serene, and Guy had to run in order to tire the fury in his mind. He did not stop until he realized by the scampering of the March hares to right and left of his path how very absurd he must appear even to the blind heavens.

"Why," he exclaimed suddenly standing still and addressing a thorn-tree on the green down. "Why, of course, now I realize the Reformation!"

This sudden apprehension of a tremendous historical fact was rather disconcerting in the way it brought home to him the uselessness of all the information that he had for years absorbed without any real response of recognition. It brought home to him how much he would have to discover for himself and appalled him with the mockery it made of

his confidence hitherto. How if all those poems he had written were merely external emotion like his conception of religion until this moment ? He really hoped the manuscript would come back this evening from whatever publisher had last eyed it disdainfully, so that in the light of this revelation of his youthfulness he could judge his life's achievement afresh. It was indeed frightening that in one moment all his comfortable standards could be struck away from beneath his feet, for if an outburst of jealousy on account of a priest's interference could suddenly re-shape his conception of history, what fundamental changes in his conception of art might not be waiting for him a little way ahead ?

The spectacle of Pauline's simple creed had hitherto pleasantly affected his senses ; and she had taken her place with the heroines of romantic poets and painters. It had been pleasant to murmur :

> *Pray but one prayer for me 'twixt thy closed lips,*
> *Think but one thought of me up in the stars :*

and to compare himself with the lover of The Blessed Damozel had been a luxurious melancholy. Pauline and he had worshipped together in chapels of Lyonesse where, if he had knelt beside her with rather a tender condescension toward her prayers, he had always been moved sincerely by the decorative appeal they made to him. He had felt a sentimental awe of her hushed approach to the altar and he had derived a kind of sentimental satisfaction from the perfection of her attitude, perhaps, even more, he had placed upon it a sentimental reliance. Her faith had been the decorative adjunct of a great deal of his verse, and he flushed hotly to remember lines that now appeared as damnable insincerities with which he had allowed his pen to play. All that piety of hers he had

sung so prettily was real and possessed an intrinsic power to injure him, so that what he had patronized and encouraged could rise up and pit itself deliberately against him. Pauline actually believed in her religion, believed in it to the extent of dishonouring their love to appease the mumbo-jumbo. That something so monstrously inexistent could have any such power was barely comprehensible, and yet here he was faced with what easily might prove to be a force powerful enough to annihilate their love. He remembered how in reading of Christina Rossetti's renunciation of a lover who did not believe as she believed, he had thought of the incident as a poet's exaggeration. And it might well have happened. Now indeed he could see why she was so much the greatest poetess of them all: her faith had been real. Lines from that Sonnet of sonnets came back to him, broken lines but full of dread:

I love . . . God the most;
Would lose not Him but you, must one be lost:

And if Pauline should speak so to him, if Pauline should disown him at the bidding of her phantom gods? How the thought swept into oblivion all his pitiful achievement, all his fretful emotions set down in rhyme. Either he must convince her that she was affrighted by vain fancies or he must bow before this reality of belief and seek humbly the truth where she discovered it. Yet if he took that course, it held no pledge of faith for him. Shamefacedly and scarcely able to bear even the thorn-tree's presence Guy knelt down and prayed that he might be given Pauline's single heart. The song of the innumerable larks rose into the crystalline, but all the prayers tumbled down from that stuffy pavilion of sky. The moment that the first emotional aspiration was thus defeated Guy was only conscious of his lapse into superstition, and furious with the surrender he went walking over the downs in a determination to shake Pauline's faith at

whatever the cost temporarily to the beautiful appearance of their love.

He wrote that evening in a fine frenzy of declamation against God, affirming in his verse the rights of man; but on reading the lines through next morning they seemed like the first vapours of adolescence; and when he turned for consolation to Shelley, he found that even a great poet's rage on behalf of man against God was often turgid enough. It was however a hopeful sign that he could still perceive what puddles these aerial fountains of song often left behind them, and he was glad to find that not all the value of critical experience had been destroyed by the imperative need to readjust his values of reality.

Birdwood brought a note from Pauline just when Guy had burnt his effusion of the night before and come to the conclusion that as a polemical and atheistic rhymester he was of the very poorest quality.

The gardener was inclined to be chatty, and when the weather and the flowers in season had been discussed at length, he observed that Miss Pauline was not looking so well as she ought to look.

"You'll have to speak to her about it, Mr. Hazlenut."

Birdwood had never learned to give Guy his proper name, and there had been many jokes between him and Pauline about this and many vows by Guy that one day he would address the gardener as Birdseed. How far away such foolish little jokes were seeming now.

"It's been a tiring Spring," said Guy. "The East wind . . ."

"Her cheeks isn't nothing like so rosy as they was," said the gardener. "You'll excuse the liberty I'm taking in mentioning them, but having known Miss Pauline since she couldn't walk . . . why I happen to mention it is that there was a certain somebody up in the town who passed the remark to me and, I having to give him a piece of my

mind pretty sharp on account of him talking so free, it sort of stuck in my memory and . . . you don't think she's middling ? "

"Oh, no, I think she's quite well," said Guy.

"Well, as long as you aren't worrited, I don't suppose I've got any call to be worrited ; only anyone can't help it a bit when they see witches' cheeks on a young lady. She certainly does look middling, but maybe, as you say, it is this unnatural East wind."

Birdwood touched his cap and retired, but his words had struck at Guy remorsefully while he walked away to a corner of the orchard, reading Pauline's letter. The starlings were piping a sweet monotony of Spring, and daffodils, that he and she had planted last Summer when they came back from Ladingford, haunted his path.

My darling,

Why haven't you been to see me this morning? Why weren't you in the orchard? I stayed such a long while in the churchyard, but you never came. If I said anything yesterday that hurt your feelings, forgive me. You mustn't think that I was angry with you because perhaps I spoke angrily. Darling, darling Guy, I adore you so, and nothing else but you matters to my happiness. I should not have spoken about religion—I don't know how we came to argue about it. It was unkind of me to be depressed and sad when my dearest was sad. Truly, truly I am so anxious about your poems only because I want you to be happy. Sometimes I must seem selfish, but you know that before anything it is your work I think of. I'm not really a bit worried about our being married. I have these fits of depression which are really very wrong. I'm not worried about anything really, only I had a dream about you last month which frightened me. Oh, Guy, come this afternoon and tell me you're not angry. I promise you that I won't make you miserable with my stupid depression. Guy, if I could only tell you how I love you

If you only knew how never, never for an instant do I care for anything but your happiness. You don't really want me to give up believing in anything do you? It doesn't really make you angry, does it? Come and tell me this afternoon that you've forgiven

Your

Pauline.

I love you. I love you.

Gently the daffodils swayed in this light breeze of dying March, and the grass was already tall enough to sigh forth its transitory summer tune. Guy in a flood of penitence hastened at once to the Rectory to accuse himself to Pauline, and when he saw her watching for him at the nursery window he had no regrets that could stab to wound him as deeply as he deserved to be wounded. She was very tender and still that afternoon, and as he held her in his arms there seemed to him nothing more worth while in life than her cherishing. For them sitting in that nursery the hours swung lazily to and fro in felicity, and all the time there was nobody to disturb the reconciliation. They talked only of the future and allowed recent despairs and foreboding agitations to slink away disgraced. Janet, coming to take away the tea-things, beamed at their happiness and through a filigree of bare jasmine twigs the slanting sun touched with new life the faded wall-paper, opening wider, it seemed, the daisies' eyes, mellowing the berries and tinting the birds with brighter plumes for their immutable and immemorial courtship.

Plunged deep in such a peace Guy prompted by damnable discord asked idly what had been that dream of which Pauline had spoken in her letter. She was unwilling for a long while to tell him, but he spurred on by mischief itself persuaded her in the end and she recounted that experience of waking to find herself prone upon the floor of her room.

"No wonder you're looking pale," he exclaimed. "Now you see the result of exciting yourself unnecessarily."

"But it was so vivid," she protested, "and really the light was blinding and it thought so terribly all the time."

"I shall think very terribly that you've been reading some spiritualistic rot in a novel," said Guy, "if you talk like that. Your religion may be true, but I'm quite sure these conjuring tricks of your fancy are a sign of hysteria. And this poor speck that was me? How did you know it was me if it was a speck? Did that think too? My foolish Pauline, you encouraged your morbid ideas when you were awake and when you were asleep you paid the penalty."

She had gone away from him and was standing by the window.

"Guy, if you talk like that, it means you don't really love me. It means you have no sympathy, that you're cold and cruel and cynical."

He sighed with elaborate compassion for her state of mind.

"And what else? I wonder how you ever managed to fall in love with me."

"Sometimes I wonder too," she said slowly.

He turned quickly and went out of the room.

Guy regretted before he was half-way down the passage what he had done, but he steeled himself against going back by persuading himself that Pauline's hysteria must be remorselessly checked. All the way back to Plashers Mead he had excuses for his behaviour, and all the way he was wondering if he had done right. Supposing that she were to persist in this exaggeration of everything, who could say into what extravagance of attitude she might not find herself driven? Rage seized him against this malady that was sapping the foundations of their love, and all his affection for her was obscured in the contemplation of that overwrought Pauline who sacrificed herself to baseless doubts and alarms. If he

once admitted her right to dream ridiculously about him, he would be encouraging her upon the road to madness. Had she not already fondled the notion of going mad, just as she would often fondle the picture of herself as the heroine of an unhappy love-affair ? If he were severe now, she would surely come to see the absurdity of these religious fears, this heart-searching and morbid sensitiveness. It was curious that he was able to keep his idea of Pauline herself quite apart from Pauline as the subject of nervous depression. He was practically ascribing to her a double personality, so distinct were the two views of her in his mind. When he got home he found the manuscript had been sent back by a seventh publisher, and on top of the packet lay a letter from his friend Comeragh.

420 Brook Street, W.

Dear Guy,

Sir George Gascony asked me to-day if I knew of someone who would suit him as private secretary. He's going out to Persia next month. I told him about you. Come up to town and meet him. He's dining here on Thursday. I'm certain you can have the job.

Yours ever

Comeragh.

At first the letter only presented itself to his imagination as an easy way of punishing Pauline's hysteria. It seemed to him the very weapon that was wanted to ' give her a lesson,' and after dinner he went across to the Rectory and announced his news in front of everybody, asking everybody if they did not think he ought to go and talking enthusiastically of oriental adventure until quite late. He sternly refused to allow himself a moment alone with Pauline in which to talk over the plan ; and, even when they were left alone together in the hall he kissed her good-night hurriedly and silently and rather guiltily.

When Guy was back at home and thought about his behaviour, he began to wonder if he had committed himself to Persia too finally. The prospect, except so far as it would affect Pauline, had not really sunk into his mind yet, but now as he read the letter over he began to think that he really would like to go. It might mean a separation of two years but it would reconcile him to his father and it would assure his marriage at the end of the time. Persia might easily be almost as interesting as it sounded, and how remote from debts looked Baghdad. If last year he had been able practically to settle to be a schoolmaster, how much more easily could this resolution be taken. Dreamily he let his imagination play round the notion of Persia, dreamily and rather pleasantly it would solve so many difficulties and it held the promise of so much active romance.

Next morning Mrs. Grey sent round to ask if Guy would come to lunch early enough to have a talk with her first.

"Yes . . . charming . . . I really wanted us to have a little talk together," she said in nervous welcome, as she led the way to her own sitting-room that with its red lacquer and its screen painted with birds of paradise hid itself away in a corner of the house. Ordinarily Guy would have accepted it as a sign of the highest favour to be brought to her small room, but this morning it seemed to imprison him.

"Yes . . . charming . . . a little talk," said Mrs. Grey; and Guy while he waited for her to begin, watched the mandarins that moved in absurd reduplications all about her armchair's faded green pattern.

"Of course it was rather a surprize to us all last night . . . yes . . . I expect it was a surprize to you. And you really think you ought to go?"

"I'm getting rather discouraged about poetry," Guy confessed. "I'm beginning to think that what I've written isn't much good and that if I am ever going to write anything worth while, it will be because I've learnt to be less self-

conscious about it. If I went to Persia with Sir George Gascony I should probably be kept fairly busy and if there was any poetry left in me after that, well, it might be good stuff."

"But you've not seen yet what people think of what you have written . . . no . . . you see the poems haven't been published yet, which is very vexing . . . and so I thought . . . I mean the Rector thought that if there was any difficulty he would like to help you to publish them . . . yes . . . rather than go away to Persia . . . you know . . . yes . . . poor little Pauline was crying nearly all night and I don't think you ought to go away suddenly like this . . . no . . . and we couldn't find an atlas anywhere!"

"You think I ought not to go?" said Guy, and he realized as he spoke that he was disappointed.

"I do think that after all these months of hoping for your poems to be a success that you ought at least to try them first, and then afterwards we can talk about Persia. I'm afraid you think I've been too strict about Pauline . . . perhaps I have . . . yes . . . and so I think that now Spring is here you can go out every day . . . yes . . . charming . . . now that the weather is getting better. . . ."

But now every day, thought Guy bitterly, there would be recriminations between them.

"Of course if you think I ought not to go, I won't," he said. "I'll write to Comeragh and refuse."

"I'm sure you're glad, aren't you?"

"Oh, rather."

"We all understood why you thought you ought to go, and now I've another plan . . . yes . . . charming. . . . I'm going to send Pauline away for a month . . . with Miss Verney . . . yes . . . charming, charming plan . . . and you must make arrangements at once about your poems . . . and then perhaps you could give them to Pauline for her birthday. . . ."

"But I don't think the Rector ought to pay for them," Guy objected.

"The Rector wants to pay for them. But of course he won't say anything about it, and you will have to make the arrangements yourself."

"You're all so good to me, and I feel such a fraud," said Guy.

"You'd better make arrangements with the man you sent them to first . . . and Pauline needn't know anything about it . . . and I shan't say I've persuaded you not to go to China . . . or else she will be worried . . . she's looking rather pale . . . I think two or three weeks by the seaside . . . Lyme Regis perhaps or Cromer . . . Lyme Regis, I think, because the trains to Folkestone have been torn out . . . yes . . . charming, charming."

After lunch Guy told Pauline in the garden that he had decided not to accept the post he had been offered, and she was so obviously overjoyed at his decision, that he no longer had the heart to feel the slightest disappointment.

"Guy, I've been so stupid," she told him. "I've depressed you without any reason, but I will come back from Scarborough quite well."

Guy began to laugh.

"Oh, why are you laughing?"

"Dearest, because I cannot make out where you really are going."

"Scarborough, because Miss Verney has chosen Scarborough."

They talked for a while of the letters that each would write to the other and of what a Summer should follow that short parting, when every day they would be together and when perhaps even such days as those at Ladingford might come again.

"And you won't worry about anything all this time you're away?" Guy asked.

"I won't, indeed I won't."

Guy went home to find a telegram from Comeragh saying that Sir George Gascony had got appendicitis and would not be going to Persia for a month or two at least. Yet he did not mention this telegram at the Rectory when next day he came to say good-bye to Pauline, because he was anxious to preserve the idea of his having vainly attempted to do something, and when he sat alone in his orchard the same afternoon, he had an emotion of something very near to relief that for a while there would be no more heart-searchings and stress, no more misgivings and reproaches and despairs. He was perfectly happy, sitting by himself in the orchard and staring at the blackthorn by the margin of the stream.

April

MISS VERNEY was so droll at Scarborough and enjoyed herself so much that Pauline in her pleasure at the success of what the old maid called their ' jaunt ' really was able to put aside for the present her own perplexities. The sands were empty at this season and the Spa unpopulous except for a few residents. The wind blew inland from a sparkling sea, while Miss Verney with bonnet all awry sitting in a draughty shelter declared that somehow like this she pictured the Riviera ; and when the weather was too bad even for Miss Verney's azure dreams Pauline and she sat cosily among the tropic shells and Berlin wool of their lodgings. Long letters used to come every day from Guy, and long letters had to be written by Pauline to him ; while perpetually Miss Verney tinkled on with marine tales that if no doubt nautically inaccurate had nevertheless a fine flavour of salt water.

" I remember I was sitting in the parlour window at Southsea when a regiment . . . I remember a Captain in the Royal Marines . . . I remember how anxious my father was that I should have been a boy."

" Oh, dear Miss Verney, you can't remember that."

" Oh, yes, he invariably spoke of me as the Midshipman, I remember. I would then have been about eight years of age . . . pray give my very kind regards to Mr. Guy and say how well we are both looking and what a benefit this fine air is to be sure, and don't forget our little expedition to the theatre. You must tell Mr. Guy the story of the piece. He will certainly enjoy hearing about that very nice-mannered

convict who . . ah dear! how my poor father used to revel in the play."

Miss Verney's conversation scarcely ever stopped, and while Pauline was writing letters it was always particularly brisk, but she used to enjoy the accompaniment as she would have enjoyed the twittering of a bird. It seemed to inspire her letters with the equable gaiety that Guy was so glad to think was coming back to her. His own letters were invariably cheerful, and Pauline began to count the days to the time when she would see him again. Easter had gone by, and the weather was so steadily fine that it was a pity not to be together. He wrote of primroses awaiting her footsteps in the forest, of blue dog-violets and cowslips in the hollows of Wychford down, of all the birds that were now arrived in England, of the cuckoo's first call and of the first swallow seen.

Come back soon, my own, my sweet, he wrote. *Come back and let this winter be all forgotten. I climbed up to the top of the church tower to-day, and oh, the tulips in your garden and oh, the emptiness of that garden notwithstanding! Come back, my Pauline, for you'll see the iris buds in the paddock and you've no idea of the way in which that river of ours sparkles on these April mornings. I wish I could tell you how remote this Winter already has grown. It has crept out of memory like a dejected nightmare at breakfast. You are never to think again about the stupid things I've said about religion: think only, my dearest, that I hope always for your faith. It would be dishonest of me to say that I believe now exactly as you believe, but I want to believe like that. Perhaps I'm illogical in writing this: perhaps all the time I do believe. Forget too what I said about Confession. I would almost go myself to prove my penitence (to you!), but I just can't bring myself to do that, because for me it really would be useless and would turn me against everything you count as holy. Forget all that has cast a shadow on our love. Count it all as my heedlessness*

and be confident that I alone was to blame. I would write more, but letters are such impossible things for intimacy. Some people can pour out their souls on paper: I can't. That's really what my poems suffer from. I have been working at them again since you were away, and they have a kind of coldness, a sort of awkward youthful reserve. Perhaps that's better than youthful exuberance, and yet I don't know. One can prune the too prodigal growth, but one can't always be sure of having the prodigality when one has the maturity. The metaphors seem to be getting rather tied up, and you must be bored by now with my chattering criticism.

Your mother came to tea yesterday and brought Monica. Margaret is rather in seclusion at present on account of Richard's arrival, I fancy. She's obviously dreading other people's notice. It is rather a self-conscious business, this waiting for the arrival of someone whom everybody expects is going to play such an important part in her life. If we were separated now for two years, it would be different; but I can see that Margaret is dreadfully afraid that now, having at last made up her mind to marry Richard, she may not care for him as much as she did. He must be a fine fellow. I'm looking forward tremendously to his coming. Monica was perfectly delightful yesterday, and grew quite excited in her nun-like way over the ultimate decoration of Plashers Mead. Dear me, what taste you all have got, and what a very great deal you've taught me! You must most of all forget that I ever said a word against your sisters. They have really equipped me in a way with a point of view toward art. I tried to tell Monica so yesterday afternoon. In fact we got on very well together. In a way, you know, she almost appreciates you more than Margaret does. You represent her hope, her ideal of the world. Worldly one, I must say good-night. Tell Miss Verney with my love that all her cats send their best respects and compliments and that Bellerophon particularly requests that his mistress will bring back whatever fish is in season at Scarborough. Oh, the funniest thing I've

forgotten to tell you! Miss Peasey was chased by some bullocks across the big field behind the orchard! She was too priceless about it when she got home.

Pauline began to think it was impossible for her ever to have had the least worry in the course of her engagement. This was the first time she had been parted from Guy for more than a week during the whole of a year, and there was something very reassuring in such an opportunity to regard him like this so disinterestedly, to find that the separation was having the traditional effect and to be positive that she was going to meet him again at the end of April more in love than ever. Nevertheless she was always aware of being grateful for the repose from problems, and she did once or twice play with the idea of having perhaps made a mistake in objecting to his going abroad. It was on occasions of doubt like this that Pauline would try to impress Miss Verney with what existence had already meant to her.

"I'm feeling so old, Miss Verney."

"Old, my dear? Oh, that cannot be true," exclaimed her friend.

"Falling very much in love does make one feel old," Pauline declared.

"Let me see," Miss Verney went on, "let me try to remember how I felt. My impression is *now* that when I was in love I felt much younger that I do at present, but perhaps that is natural, for it is very nearly thirty years ago since William and I parted."

"Is he still alive?"

"Oh, yes, he is still alive, but I have never seen him and he must be wonderfully altered. Sometimes I think of all the days that have gone by since we parted. It seems so strange to think of our lives being able to go on, when once it seemed to both of us that life could not go on at all if we were not together. It seems so strange to think of him

eating his lunch somewhere at the same time that somewhere else I am eating my lunch. Who knows if he ever thinks of me, who knows indeed ? "

"If anything happened to prevent our marriage," began Pauline thoughtfully, and then was silent.

Miss Verney opened wide her pale blue eyes.

"And what could happen ? " she asked grandly.

"I've no business to imagine such a thing, have I ? "

"None whatever," said Miss Verney decidedly.

But had Miss Verney's love affair been complicated by anything more than merely natural difficulties ? Guy's debts and unsuccess were nothing in comparison with other elements of disaccord . . . and then Pauline pulled herself up from brooding and resolutely forced her mind to contemplate a happy Summer. Had she not just now been congratulating herself upon the disappearance of all worries in this sea-air ?

The time at Scarborough drew to a close, and about a week before her birthday came the news of Richard's arrival from India. She and Miss Verney packed up and were home in Wychford two days before they were expected.

"Richard, how lovely to see you again," Pauline cried. "And oh, Richard, I'm sure you've grown. Don't you think he has grown ? " she demanded of everybody. "Richard, how clever of you to grow when you're twenty-seven."

It was really like old times to go babbling on like this, while Richard sat and smiled encouragingly and spoke never a word.

"Coming for a stroll ? " he asked.

"Oh, but I ought to see Guy first," she said. "Richard, I hope you like Guy."

He nodded.

"Do you think he looks like a poet ? "

"Never seen a poet before," said Richard.

"Oh, but like your idea of a poet ? "

"Never thought much about poets," said Richard. "So you aren't coming for a stroll?"

"I will to-morrow, but I must spend the sunset with Guy."

Guy was waiting for her by the paddock, and they floated downstream out of reach of people. In their own peninsula they kissed away the absence of twenty-two days.

"You look much better," said Guy critically.

"I'm perfectly well."

"And happy?"

She answered him with her eyes.

"Why, Pauline, I believe you're quite shy of me!"

She blushed.

"I really am a little, you know," she whispered. "Did you like Richard? Oh, Guy, I hope you did."

"Of course I did."

"And, Guy, you don't mind if I go for a walk with him to-morrow morning? You see, I know he's longing to hear about Margaret and himself."

"But you'll come out with me in the afternoon?"

"Why, of course."

"Then Richard may have the morning," said Guy. "And I hope you'll arrange everything between him and Margaret so successfully that he won't steal any more hours from me."

When Pauline had left Guy that evening she thought how strangely it had been like meeting him for the first time all over again. Or rather it was as if they had walked a long way down the wrong road and were now beginning to walk somewhat tentatively along what she hoped was surely the right road at last. Her duty was above all to help Guy with the material burdens: she must never again let him think that his debts or his prospects had any power to worry her. Merely most tactfully must she try to keep him from extravagance, and, oh dear, how she hoped that he had not

bought her an expensive birthday present. It was too late to say anything about it now, but if Guy had been wisely economical, how happy she would be. How she hoped too that Richard had not brought home from India a present that would annoy Margaret. Really it was a most oppressive business, this week before her coming of age, for between Guy's extravagance and Richard's . . . well, it was really not so much bad taste as Indian taste. She would love anything he gave her of course, but perhaps he would consult beforehand with Margaret. Dear Richard, he was so sweet and touching, and if only he had not brought her something *very* elaborately carved. She met him next morning half way to Fairfield, and two years were obliterated as she kept pace with his long stride when they turned aside from the high road and tramped upward over the grassy wold.

"Richard, isn't it very hot in India?"

He nodded.

"And didn't you ever get used to walking a bit more slowly in India?"

He laughed.

"You lazy little thing. I thought you and Aunt Verney had been in training at Scarborough. Come on, let's sit down then."

They sat down, and Richard drew with his stick in the close turf.

"Is that your bridge?" Pauline asked with all the interest she could put into her voice.

He laughed for a long time.

"Pauline, you villain, it's the beginning of Margaret's face!"

She clapped her hands.

"Oh, Richard, aren't I a villain? But, you know, it's not very frightfully like anything, is it?"

"Pauline," he said suddenly in that sharp voice in which two years ago he had entrusted his interests to her before

he went away. " Pauline, is Margaret going to marry me ? "

" Why, of course she is, Richard."

" Has she spoken to you about me ? "

" But you know she never speaks about her own affairs and that she can't bear anybody else to speak of them to her."

" Then how do you know ? " he asked.

" Well, perhaps because I'm so much in love with Guy," Pauline whispered.

" I don't see how that quite works. I'm a very dull sort of a chap after that Guy of yours."

" But you're not at all," Pauline declared. " And if you take my advice you won't think you're dull. You'll make Margaret marry you. Really I'm sure that what she would like best is to be made to do something. You see, she's a darling but she is just a very tiny little bit spoilt. You mustn't be so patient with her. But, Richard dear, I know she loves you, because she practically told Guy that she did."

" Guy ? " he echoed looking rather indignant.

" Well, you must understand how sweet Margaret was to him about me. She was so sympathetic, and really she practically brought about our engagement. Oh, I do love her so, Richard, and I do want her to be happy and I do know so dreadfully well that you are the very person to make her happy."

" Pauline, you are a pink brick," he avowed.

And scarcely another word did he say for the rest of their walk.

Pauline went to Margaret's room that night and, after fidgeting all the while her sister was undressing, suddenly plunged down beside her bed and caught hold of her hand.

" Margaret, you're not to snub me, because I absolutely must speak. I must beg you not to keep Richard waiting any longer. Do, my darling, darling Margaret, do be kind to him and not so cold. He simply adores you, and . . . why,

Margaret, you're crying . . . oh, let me kiss you, my Margaret, because you were so wonderful about Guy, and I've been a beast to you and you must, you must be happy."

"If I could only love him as you love Guy," Margaret sighed between her tears.

"You do really . . . at least perhaps not *quite* as much. Oh, Margaret, don't be angry with me if I whisper something to you : think how much you would love him if you and he had . . . Margaret, you know what I mean."

Pauline blew out the candle and rushed from the dark room ; and lying awake in her own bed, she fancied among the flowers of the Rectory such fairy children for Margaret and herself, such fairy children dancing by the margin of the river.

May

ON the morning before Pauline's birthday Guy received a letter from Michael Fane announcing abruptly his engagement and adding that on account of worldly opposition he had been persuaded into a postponement of his marriage for two months. Guy was rather ironically amused by the serious manner in which Michael took so brief a delay, and he could not help thinking how unreasonably impatient of trifles people with ample private means often showed themselves. Michael wrote that he would like to spend some of his probation at Plashers Mead and alluded to the 'luck' of his friend in being so near his Pauline.

Guy wrote a letter of congratulation, and then he put Michael's news out of his mind in order to examine the two complete sets of the proofs of his poems which had also arrived that morning. He was engaged in the task of making rather a clumsy binding for them out of a piece of stained vellum, when Richard Ford came round to Plashers Mead. Guy welcomed him gladly, for besides the personal attraction he felt toward this lean and silent engineer he perceived in the likelihood of Richard's speedy marriage an earnest of his own. Somehow that marriage was going to break the spell of inactivity, to which at the Rectory all seemed to be subject and from which Guy was determined to keep Richard free, even if it were necessary to shake him as continuously as tired wanderers in the snow are shaken out of a dangerous sleep.

"I came round to consult with you about my present to Pauline to-morrow," said Richard very solemnly. "I've

brought round one or two little things, so that you could give me your advice."

"Why, of course I will," said Guy.

"They're downstairs in the hall. I had some difficulty in explaining to your housekeeper that I wasn't a pedlar."

In the hall was stacked a pile completely representative of the bazaar: half-a-dozen shawls, the model of a temple, a carved table, some inlaid stools, every sort of typical oriental gewgaw, in fact an agglomeration that seemed to invite the smell of cheap incense for its effective display.

"Godbold drove them over," Richard explained as he saw Guy's astonishment. "Now look here, what's the best present for Pauline? You see I'm not at all an artistic sort of chap, and I don't want to hoick forward something that's going to be more of a nuisance than anything else."

"It's really awfully difficult to choose," said Guy rather ambiguously.

Then he discovered a simple ivory paper-knife which he declared was just the thing, having the happy thought that he would not cut the set of proofs he was binding for Pauline, so that to-morrow Richard could have the pleasure of beholding his gift put to immediate use.

"You've chosen the smallest thing of the lot," said the disappointed donor. "You don't think a shawl as well?" he asked, holding up yards of gaudy material.

"Well, candidly I think Pauline's too fair for that colour scheme, don't you?"

"All right, the paper-knife. You don't mind if I leave these things here till Godbold can fetch them away, and . . . er . . . I wish you'd choose something for yourself. I've always taken a kind of interest in this house, don't you know, and I've often thought about it in India."

"I'd like a gong," said Guy at once, and Richard was obviously gratified by his quick choice, and still farther gratified when Guy suggested they should sound it immedi-

ately outside the kitchen-door. Solemnly Richard held it up in the passage, while Guy crashed forth a glorious clamour, at the summons of which Miss Peasey came rushing out.

"Good gracious," she gasped. "I thought that dog Bob had jumped through the window."

"This is a present for us from India," Guy shouted.

"Oh, that's extremely handsome, isn't it? Well now, I shall expect you to be punctual in future for your meals. Dear me, yes, quite a variety, I'm sure, after that measley bell."

The gong was given a prominent position in the bare hall, and Guy invited Richard up to his own room. After the question of the presents had been solved Richard was shy and silent again, and Guy found it very hard to make conversation. Several times his visitor seemed on the point of getting something off his mind, but when he was given an opportunity for speech, he never accepted it. Desperate for a topic Guy showed him the proofs of the poems and explained that he was binding them roughly as his present to Pauline to-morrow.

"That's something I can't understand," said Richard intensely. "Writing! It beats me!"

"Bridges would beat me," said Guy.

Richard looked quite cheerful at this notion and under the influence of the encouragement he had received seemed at last on the point of getting out what he wanted to say, but he could manage nothing more confidential than a tug at his bristled fair moustache.

"When are you and Margaret going to be married?" Guy asked abruptly, for of course he had guessed that it was Margaret's name which was continually on the tip of his tongue.

"By Jove, there you are, I'm rather stumped," said Richard gloomily. "You see the thing is . . . well . . . I suppose

you know that when I started off to India last June year, Margaret and I were sort of engaged . . . at least I was certainly engaged to her, only she hadn't absolutely made up her mind about me . . . and of course that's just what you'd expect would happen to a chap like me . . . dash it all, Hazlewood, I'm afraid to ask her again ! "

" I don't think you need be," said Guy. " Of course we haven't discussed you, except very indirectly," he hastily added, " but I'm positive that Margaret is only waiting for you to ask her to marry her on some definite day: on some definite day, Ford, that's the great thing to remember."

" You mean I ought to say ' Margaret, will you marry me on the twelfth of August, or the first of September ? ' That's your notion, is it ? "

Guy nodded.

" By gad, I'll ask her to-day," said Richard.

" And you'll be engaged to-morrow," Guy prophesied.

" When are you and Pauline going to be married ? "

Guy looked up quickly to see if the solid Richard were laughing at him, but there was nothing in those steel-blue eyes except the most benevolent enquiry.

" That's the question," said Guy. " Writing is not quite such a certainty as bridge-building."

" You mean there's the difficulty of money ? By Jove, that's bad luck, isn't it ? Still, you know, I expect that having the good fortune to have Pauline in love with you . . . well, I expect, you've got to expect a bit of difficulty somewhere, you know. You know, Pauline was . . ." he stopped and blinked at the window.

" Pauline's awfully fond of you," Guy said encouragingly.

" Hazlewood, that kid's been . . . well, I can't express myself, you know, but I'd . . . well, I really can't talk about her."

" I understand though," said Guy. " Look here, you'll

stay and have lunch with me, and then we can go across to the Rectory afterwards."

Emotional subjects were tacitly put on one side to talk of the birds and butterflies that one might expect to find round Wychford, of Miss Verney and Godbold and other local characters, or of the prospects of the cricket team that year. After lunch Guy put the unbound set of proofs in his pocket and, launching the canoe, they floated down to the Rectory paddock. Mrs. Grey and the girls were all in the garden picking purple tulips, and Guy taking Pauline aside told her on what momentous quest Richard was come, suggesting that he should occupy the Rector's attention, while Pauline lured away her mother and Monica.

The Rector was sitting in the library hard at work, rubbing the fluff from the anemone seeds with sand.

" And what can I do for you, Sir ? " he asked.

" I thought you'd like to see the proofs of my poems," said Guy.

He laid the duplicates on the dusty table and tried to thank his patron for what he had done. The Rector waved a clay pipe deprecatingly.

" You must thank Constance . . . you must thank my wife, if you thank anybody. But if I were you I shouldn't thank anybody till you find out for certain that she's done you a service," he recommended with a twinkle.

Guy laughed.

" Worrall doesn't want to publish until the Autumn."

The Rector made a face.

" All that time to wait for the verdict ? "

" Time seems particularly hostile to me," Guy said.

" You'll have to tweak his forelock pretty hard."

" That's what I've come to consult you about. Do you think I ought to go to Persia with Sir George Gascony ? Mrs. Grey thought I oughtn't to take so drastic a step until I had first tested my poems in public. But I've been reading

them through, and they don't somehow look quite as important in print as they did in manuscript. I can't help feeling that I ought to have a regular occupation. What do you really advise me to do, Mr. Grey?"

The Rector held up his arms in mock dismay.

"Gracious goodness me, don't implicate a poor country parson in such affairs! I can give you advice about flowers and I can pretend to give you advice about your soul, but about the world, no, no."

"I think perhaps I'll get some journalistic work in town," Guy suggested.

"Persia or journalism!" commented the Rector. "Well, well, they're both famous for fairy tales. I recommend journalism as being nearer at hand."

"Then I'll take your advice."

"Oh, dear me, you must not involve me in such a responsibility. Now, if you were a nice rational iris I would talk to you, but for a talented young man with his life before him I shouldn't even be a good quack. Come along, let's go out and look at the tulips."

"You *will* glance through my poems?" Guy asked diffidently.

The Rector stood up and put his hand on the poet's shoulder.

"Of course I will, my dear boy, and you mustn't be deceived by the manner of that shy old boor, the Rector of Wychford. Do what you think you ought to do, and make my youngest daughter happy. We shall be having her birthday before we know where we are."

"It's to-morrow!"

"Is it indeed? May Day. Of course. I remember last year I managed to bloom Iris Lorteti. But this year, no! That wet May destroyed Iris Lorteti. A delicate creature. Rose and brown. A delicate lovely creature."

Guy and the Rector pored over the tulips a while where

in serried borders they displayed their sombre sheen of amaranth and amethyst: then Guy strolled off to hear what was the news of Margaret and Richard. Pauline came flying to meet him down one of the long straight garden-paths.

"Darling, they are to be married early in August," she cried.

He caught her to him and kissed her, lest in the first poignant realization of other people's joy she might seem to be escaping from him utterly.

Guy had a few minutes with Margaret before he went home that evening, and they walked beside the tulip borders, she tall and dark and self-contained in the fading light being strangely suited by association with such flowers.

"Dear Margaret," he said, "I want to tell you how tremendously I like Richard. Now that sounds patronizing. But I'm speaking quite humbly. These sort of Englishmen have been celebrated enough perhaps, and lately there's been a tendency to laugh at them, but, my God, what is there on earth like the Richards of England? Margaret, you once very rightly reproved me for putting Pauline in a silver frame, do let me risk your anger and beg you never to put yourself in a silver frame from which to look out at Richard."

"You do rather understand me, don't you?" she said offering him her hand.

"Help Pauline and me," he begged.

"Haven't I always helped you?"

"Not always, but you will now that you yourself are no longer uncertain about your future. The moment you find yourself perfectly happy you'll be longing for everyone else to be the same."

"But how haven't I helped you?" she persisted.

"It would be difficult to explain in definite words. But I don't think my idea of your attitude toward us could have been entirely invented by my fancy."

"What attitude? What do you mean, Guy?"

He shook his head.

"My dear, if you aren't conscious of it, I'm certainly not going to attempt to put it into words and involve myself in such a net."

"How tantalizing you are!"

"No, I'm not. If you have the least inclination to think I may be right, then you know what I mean and you can do what I ask. If you haven't the least notion of what I mean, then it was all my fancy and I'm certainly not going to give my baseless fancies away."

"This is all too cryptic," she murmured.

"Then let it remain undeciphered," he said smiling; and he led the conversation more directly toward their marriage and the strangeness of the Rectory without Margaret.

Richard spent the night at Plashers Mead, and Guy heard the halting account of two years' uncertainty, of the bungalow that had been taken and embowered against Margaret's coming, and of the way in which his bridge had spanned not merely the river, but the very ocean, and even time itself.

Pauline's birthday morning was cloudless, and Guy, though to himself he was inclined to blame the action as weak, went to church and knelt beside her. Then afterward there was the scene of breakfast on the lawn that already with only this first repetition wore for him an immemorial air, so that he could no longer imagine a May Day that was not thus inaugurated. The presentation of his poems in proof had not a bit less wonderful an effect than he had hoped, for Pauline could never finish turning over the pages and loving the ludicrously tumbledown binding.

"Oh, it's so touching! I wish they could all be bound like this. And how I adore Richard's paper-knife."

The four lovers disappeared after breakfast to enjoy the flashing May Day, and Monica left alone with her mother

looked a little sad, she, the only one of those three lovely daughters of the Rectory still undisturbed by the demands of the invading world.

May that year was like the fabled Spring of poets ; and Guy and Pauline were left free to enjoy the passionate and merry month as perhaps never before had they enjoyed any season, not even that dreamed away fortnight at Ladingford last year. They had ceased for a while with the engagement of Richard and Margaret to be the central figures of the Rectory whether for blame or commendation, and desiring nothing better than to be left without interference they were lost in apple-blossom to every-day existence. Guy with the prospect of his poems' appearing in the Autumn felt that he was justified in forgetting responsibilities and, having weathered the financial crisis of the March quarter, he had now nothing to worry him until Midsummer. That was the date he had fixed upon in his mind as suitable for making a determined attempt upon London. He had planned to shut up Plashers Mead and to take a small room in Chelsea whence he would conquer in a few months the material obstacles that prevented their marriage. The poems now that they were in print seemed a less certain talisman to fame ; but they would serve their purpose, indeed they had served their purpose already, for this long secluded time would surely counterbalance the too easy victories of journalism. He would surely by now have lost that spruce Oxford cleverness and might fairly expect to earn his living with dignity. The least success would justify his getting married, and Pauline would enjoy two years spent high in some London attic within the sound of chirping sparrows and the distant whispers of humanity. They would perhaps be able to afford to fly for magic weeks to Plashers Mead, pastoral interludes in that crowded life which lay ahead. How everything had resolved itself latte rly, and how ths gift of glorious May should be accepted as the intimate and

dearest benefaction to their love. He and Pauline were together from earliest morn to the last minute of these rich and shadowy eves. They wreathed their boat with boughs of apple-blossom and went farther up the river than they had ever gone. The cuckoo was still in tune, and still the kingcups gilded all that hollow land : there was not yet the lush growth of weeds and reeds that indolent June would use to delay their dreaming progress : and still all the trees and all the hedges danced with that first sharp green of Spring, that cold and careless green of Spring.

Then when the hawthorn came into prodigal bloom, and all the rolling country broke in endless waves of blossom, Pauline in her muslin dress seemed like an airy joy sustained by all these multitudinous petals, dancing upon this flowery tide, this sweet foam of May.

"My flower, my sweet, are you indeed mortal ?" he whispered.

The texture of her sleeve against his was less tangible than the light breeze that puffed idly from the South to where they sat enraptured upon the damasked English grass. Apple-blossom powdered her lap and starred her light brown hair, and around them like a Circean perfume drowning the actual world hung the odorous thickets of hawthorn.

The month glided along until the time of ragged robins came round again, and as if these flowers were positively of ill omen to Guy and Pauline, Mrs. Grey suddenly took it into her head again that they were seeing too much of each other.

"I said you could see Pauline every day," she told Guy. "But I did not say all day."

"But I shall be going away soon," he said, "and it seems a pity to lose any of this lovely month."

"I'm sure I'm right . . . and I did not know you had really decided to go away . . . I'm sure, yes, I'm positive I'm right. . . . Why don't you be more like Margaret and

Richard . . . they aren't together all day long . . . no, not all day."

"But Pauline is so different from Margaret," Guy argued.

"Yes, I know . . . that's the reason . . . she is too impulsive. . . . Yes, it's much better not to be together all the time. . . . I'm glad you've settled to go to London . . . then perhaps you can be married next year. . . ."

A rule came into force again, and Guy began to feel the old exasperation against the curb upon youth's leisure. Rather unjustly he blamed Margaret, because he felt that the spectacle of her sedate affection made his for Pauline appear too wild and Pauline herself beside Margaret seem completely distraught with love.

It pleased Guy rather, and yet in a way it rather annoyed him that Michael Fane should choose this moment to announce his intention of spending some time at Plashers Mead. Perhaps a little of the doubt was visible in his welcome, because Michael asked rather anxiously if he were intruding upon the May idyll: Guy laughed off the slight awkwardness and asked why Michael had not yet managed to get married. They talked about the evils of procrastination, but Guy could not at all see that Michael had much to complain of in a postponement of merely two months. His friend, however, was evidently rather upset, and he could not resist expatiating a little on his own grief with what Guy thought was the petulance of the too fortunate man. The warm May nights lulled them both and they used to pass pleasant evenings, leaning over the stream while the bats and fern-owls flew across the face of the decrescent moon; yet for Guy all the beauty of the season was more than ever endowed with intolerable fugacity.

Pauline with Michael's arrival began to be moody again; would take no kind of interest in Michael's engagement; would only begin to see again the endless delays that hung

so heavily round their marriage. Michael was not at all in the way, for he spent all the time writing to his lady-love, of whom he had told Guy really nothing ; or he would sit in the lengthening grass of the orchard and read books of poetry, the pages of which used to wink with lucid reflections caught from the leaves of the fruit-trees overhead.

Guy looked over his shoulder and saw that he was reading The Statue and the Bust :

> *So weeks grew months, years ; gleam by gleam*
> *The glory dropped from their youth and love,*
> *And both perceived they had dreamed a dream ;*

"That poem haunts me," exclaimed Guy with a shudder.

> *Where is the use of the lip's red charm,*
> *The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,*
> *And the blood that blues the inside arm—*
>
> *Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,*
> *The earthly gift to an end divine ?*

"And yet I can't stop reading it," he sighed.

> *How do their spirits pass, I wonder,*
> *Nights and days in the narrow room ?*
>
> *Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder*
> *What a gift life was, ages ago,*
> *Six steps out of the chapel yonder.*

On this Summer morning the words wrote themselves in fire across his brain.

"They light the way to dusty death," he muttered over and over again, when he had left Browning to Michael and flung himself face downward in the orchard grass.

In despair of what a havoc time was making of their youth and their love, that very afternoon he begged Pauline to

meet him again now in these dark nights of early Summer, now when soon he would be going away from her.

"Going away?" she echoed in alarm. "I suppose that's the result of your friend's visit."

Guy, however, was not going to surrender again, and he insisted that when a month had passed he would indeed be gone from Plashers Mead. It was nothing to do with Michael Fane: it was solely his own determination to put an end to this unprofitable dalliance.

"But your poems? I thought that when your poems were published everything would be all right."

"Oh, my poems," he scoffed. "They're valueless!"

"Guy!"

"They're mere decoration. They are trifles."

"I don't understand you."

"I care for nothing but to be married to you. For nothing, do you hear? Pauline, everything is to be subordinate to that. I would even write and beg my father to take me as a junior usher at Fox Hall for that. We must be married soon. I can't bear to see Richard and Margaret sailing along so calmly and quietly toward happiness."

In the end he persuaded her to make all sorts of opportunities to meet him when no one else knew they were together. Even once most recklessly on a warm and moonless night of May's languorous decline to June he took her in the canoe far away up the river; and when they floated home dawn was already glistening on the banks and on the prow of their ghostly canoe. Through bird-song and rosy vapours she fled from him to her silent room, while he stood in a trance and counted each dewy footstep that with silver traceries marked her flight across the lawn.

ANOTHER SUMMER

June

MICHAEL FANE stayed on into June, and the fancy came to Pauline that he knew of these meetings with Guy at night. It enraged her with jealousy to think that he might have been taken into Guy's confidence so far and the prejudice against him grew more violent every day. She already had enough regrets for having given way to Guy's persuasion, and the memory of that last return at dawn to her cool reproachful room haunted her more bitterly when she thought of its no longer being a secret. The knowledge that Guy was soon going to leave Plashers Mead was another torment, for though in a way she was glad of his wanting to make the determined effort, she could not help connecting the resolve with his friend's visit, and in consequence of this her one desire was to upset the plan. The sight of Richard and Margaret progressing equably toward their marriage early in August also made her jealous, and she began unreasonably to ascribe to her sister an attitude of superiority that she allowed to gall her: and whenever Richard was praised by any of the family she could never help feeling now that the praise covered or implied a corresponding disparagement of Guy. With Monica she nearly quarrelled over religion, for though in her heart it occupied the old supreme place, her escapades at night, by the tacit leave they seemed to give Guy to presume that religion no longer counted as her chief resource, had led her for the first time to make herself appear outwardly indifferent. In fact she now dreaded going to church, because she felt that if she once surrendered to the holy influence she would suffer again all the remorse of the winter

that now by desperate deferment she was able for a little while to avoid. On top of all this vexation of soul she was angry with Guy because he seemed unable to realize that they were both walking on the edge of an abyss, and that all this abandonment of themselves to the joy of the fugitive season was a vain attempt to cheat fate. At such an hour she was naturally jealous that a friend's private affairs should occupy so much of Guy's attention, when he himself was walking blindly toward the doom of their love that now sometimes in flashes of horrible clarity she beheld at hand. Guy, however, persisted in trying to force Michael upon her: the jealousy such attempts fostered made her more passionate when she was alone with him, and this, as all the while she dreadfully foresaw, heaped up the reckoning that her conscience would presently have to pay.

One afternoon she and Margaret and Monica went to tea at Plashers Mead, when to her sharp annoyance she found herself next to Guy's friend. She made up her mind at the beginning of the conversation that he was criticizing her and, feeling shy and awkward, she could only reply to him in gasps and monosyllables and blushes. He seemed to her the coldest person she had ever known: he seemed utterly without emotion or sympathy: he must surely be the worst friend imaginable for Guy. He took no interest in anything apparently; and then suddenly he definitely revealed himself as the cause of Guy's ambition to conquer London.

"I think Guy ought to go away from here," he was saying. "I told him when he first took this house that he would be apt to dream away all his time here. You must make him give it up, Miss Grey. He's such an extraordinarily brilliant person that it would be terrible if he let himself do nothing in the end. Of course he's been lucky to meet you, and that's kept him alive, but now he ought to go to London. He really ought."

Pauline hated herself for the way in which she was gasping

out her monosyllabic agreement with all this; but she did not feel able to argue with Michael Fane. He disconcerted her by his air of severe judgment, and however hard she tried she could not contradict him. Then suddenly in a rage with herself and with him she began to talk nonsense at the top of her voice, rattling on until her sisters looked up at her in surprize, while Michael evidently embarrassed scarcely answered. At last the uncomfortable visit came to an end, and as she walked back with Guy, while the others went in front, she began to inveigh against the friend more fiercely than ever.

"My dear, I can't think why you have him to stay with you. He hates your being engaged to me. . . ."

"Oh, nonsense," Guy interrupted rather crossly.

"He does, he does; and he hates your staying down here. He says Plashers Mead is ruining you and that you ought to go to London. Now, you see, I know why you want to go there."

"Really, Pauline, you're talking nonsense. I'm going to London because I'm positive that your father and mother both think I ought to go. And I'm positive myself that I ought to go. I've been wrong to stay here all this time. I've done nothing to help forward our marriage. Look how nervous and . . . how nervous and overwrought you've become. It's all my fault."

"How I hate that friend of yours!"

Guy looked up in astonishment at the fervour of her tone.

"And how he hates me," she went on.

"Oh, really, my dear child, you are ridiculous," Guy exclaimed petulantly. "Are you going to take up this attitude towards all my friends? You're simply horridly jealous, that's the whole matter."

Pauline did not quarrel now, because she thought it might gratify Michael Fane to see the discord he had created,

but she treasured up her anger and knew that, when later she and Guy were alone, she would say whatever hard things now rested unsaid. Next morning Guy asked her if she would be very cross to hear that he was going to town for a night.

"With your friend?" she asked.

He nodded, and she turned away from him clouded blue eyes.

"It *is* unfair of you to hate Michael," he pleaded. "I told him you thought he was cold, and he said at once, 'do tell her I'm not cold, and say how lovely I think her.' He said you were very lovely and strange . . . a fairy's child."

Still Pauline would not turn her head.

"I told him that you were indeed a fairy's child," Guy went on, "and I told him how sometimes I felt I should go off my head with the responsibility your happiness was to me. For indeed, Pauline, it is, it is a responsibility."

She felt she must yield when Guy spoke like that, but then unfortunately he began to talk about his friend again and sullen jealousy returned.

"Listen, Pauline. I'm going up to town because Michael wants me to see this girl he is going to marry. He was rather pathetic about her. It seems that . . . well . . . it's a sort of misalliance, and his people are angry about it, and really I must be loyal and go up to town and help him with . . . well . . . you see really all his friends have been unsympathetic about her."

"I expect they've every right to be," said Pauline.

"I do think you're unreasonable. I'm only going away for a night."

"Oh, go, go, go," she cried, and pulling herself free of his caress, she left him by the margin of the stream disconsolate and perplexed.

Pauline, when Guy had gone to London with his friend, began to fret herself with the fear that he would not come

back, and she was very remorseful at the thought that if he did not she would be responsible. She half expected to get a letter next day to tell her of his determination to remain in town for good, and when no letter came she exaggerated still more all her fears and longed to send him a telegram to ask if he had arrived safely, railing at herself for having let him leave her without knowing where he was going to stay. By the following afternoon all the jealousy of Michael had been swallowed up in a passionate desire for Guy's return, and when about three o'clock she saw him coming through the wicket in the high grey wall her heart beat fast with relief. She said not a word about Guy's journey, nor did she even ask if his friend had come back with him. She cared for nothing but to show by her tenderness how penitent she was for that yesterday which had torn such a rent in the perfection of their love. Guy was visibly much relieved to find that her jealous fit had passed away, and when she asked for an account of his journey he gave it to her most eagerly.

"Yesterday was rather tragic," he said. "We went to see this Lily Haden to whom Michael had engaged himself, and . . . well . . . it's impossible to explain to you what happened, but it was all very horrible and rather like a scene in a French play. Anyhow Michael is cured of that fancy, and now he talks of going out of England and even of becoming a monk. These extraordinary religious fads that succeed violent emotion of an utterly different kind! Personally I don't think the monkish phase will survive the disillusionment that's just as much bound to happen in religion as it was bound to happen over that girl."

"What was she like?" Pauline asked, resolving to appear interested in Michael.

"I never saw her," said Guy. "The tragedy took place 'off' in the Aristotelian manner."

"Oh, Guy, don't use such long words."

"Dear little thing, I wish you wouldn't ask any more about this girl. She is something quite outside your imagination; though I could make of her behaviour such a splendid lesson for you, when you think *you* have behaved dreadfully in escaping from your room for an hour or two of moonlight. Poor Michael! he's as scrupulous as you are, and it's rather ironical that you and he shouldn't get on. Puritans, both of you! Now there's another friend of mine, Maurice Avery, whom you'd probably like very much, and yet he isn't worth Michael's little finger."

"Did you see him yesterday?"

"Yes, we went round to his studio in Grosvenor Road. Oh, my dear, such a glorious room looking out over the river right into the face of the young moon coming up over Lambeth. A jolly old Georgian house. And at the back another long low window looking out over a sea of roofs to the sunset behind the new Roman cathedral. There were lots of people there, and a man was playing that Brahms sonata your mother likes so much. Pauline, you and I simply must go and live in Chelsea or Westminster and we can come back to Plashers Mead after the most amazing adventures. You would be such a rose on a London window-sill, or would you then be a tuft of London Pride, all blushes and bravery?"

"Bravery! Why I'm frightened to death by the idea of going to live in London. Oh, Guy, I'm frightened of anything that will break into our life here."

"But, dearest, we can't stay at Wychford for ever doing nothing. Read The Statue and the Bust if you want to understand the dread that lies cold on my heart sometimes. Think how already nearly twenty months have gone by since we met, and still we are in the same position. We know each other better and we are more in love than ever, but you have all sorts of worries at the back of your mind and I have all sorts of ambitions not yet fulfilled. Michael

has at least managed to make a complete ass of himself, but what have I done ? "

" Your poems . . . your poems," she murmured despairingly. " Are your poems really no use ? Oh, Guy, that seems such a cruel thing to believe."

Guy talked airily of what much more wonderful things he was going to write, and when he asked Pauline to meet him this very midnight on the river, she had to consent, because in the thought that he appeared to be drifting out of reach of her love she felt half distraught and would have sacrificed anything to keep him by her.

The June evening seemed of a sad uniform green, for the blossom of the trees was departed and the borders were not yet marching in Midsummer array. There was always a sadness about these evenings of early June, a sadness, and sometimes a threat when the wind blew loudly among the young foliage. Those gusty eves were almost preferable to this protracted and luminous melancholy in which the sinking crescent of the moon hung scarcely more bright than ivory. The pensive beauty was too much for Pauline, who wished that she could shut out the obstinate day and read by candlelight such a book as Alice in Wonderland until it was time to go to bed. Her white fastness, rose-bloomed by sunset as she dressed for dinner, reproached her intention of abandoning its shelter to-night, and she determined that this should really be the last escapade. There was no harm in what she had done of course, as Guy assured her, and yet there was harm in behaving so traitorously toward that narrow white bed, toward pious wide-eyed Saint Ursula and Tobit's companionable angel.

The languor of the evening was heavy upon all the family : Monica was the only one who had the energy to go to her instrument. She played Chopin, and the austerity of her method made the ballades and the nocturnes more dangerously sweet. Gradually the melodies lulled most of Pauline's

fears and charmed her to look forward eagerly to the velvet midnight when she with Guy beside her would float deep into such caressing glooms. After Monica had played them all into drowsiness, Pauline had to wait until the last sound had died away in the house and the illumination of the last window had faded from the bodeful night that was stroking her window with invitation to come forth.

Twelve o'clock clanged from the belfry, and Pauline opened her bedroom door to listen. She had put on her white frieze coat, for although the night was warm the wearing of such outdoor garb gave a queer kind of propriety to the whole business, and at the far end of the long corridor she saw herself in the dim candlelight mirrored like a ghost in the Venetian glass. From the heart of the house the cuckoo calling midnight a minute or two late made her draw back in alarm, and not merely in alarm, but also rather sentimentally, as if by her action she were going to offend that innocent bird of childhood. She wondered why to-night she felt so sensitive beforehand, since usually the regret had followed her action; but promising herself that to-night should indeed be the last time she would ever take this risk, she crept on tip-toe down the stairs.

In the glimmering starshine Pauline could see Guy standing by the wicket in the high grey wall, a remote and spectral form against the blackness all around him where the invisible trees gathered and hoarded the gloom. She sighed with relief to find that the arms with which so gently he enfolded her were indeed warm with life. Her passage over the lawn had been one long increasing fear that the shape, so indeterminate and motionless that awaited her approach, might not be Guy in life, but a wan image of what he had been, a demon lover, a shadow from the cave of death.

"Guy, my darling, my darling, it is you! Oh, I was so

frightened that when I came close you wouldn't really be there."

She leaned half sobbing upon his shoulder.

"Pauline, don't talk so loud. I only did not come across the lawn to meet you for fear of attracting attention."

"Let me go back now," she begged, "now that I've seen you."

But Guy soon persuaded her to come with him through the wicket and out over the paddock where the grass whispered in their track, until at the sight of the canoe's outline she lost her fears and did not care how recklessly she explored the deeps of the night.

In silence they travelled upstream under the vaulted willows: under the giant sycamore whose great roots came writhing out of the darkness above the sheen of the water: under Wychford bridge whose cold breath dripped down in icy beads upon the thick swirl beneath: and then out through starshine across the mill-pool. Pauline held her breath while around their course was a sound of water sucking at the vegetation, gurgling and lapping and chuckling against the invisible banks.

"The Abbey stream?" murmured Guy.

She scarcely breathed her consent, and the canoe tore the growing sedge like satin as it bumped against the slope of the bank. Pauline felt that she was protesting with her real self against the part she was playing in this dream: but the dream became too potent and she had to help Guy to push the canoe up through the grass and down again into the quiet water beyond. It was much blacker here on account of the overhanging beeches, but continually Pauline strained through the darkness for a sight of the deserted house the windows of which seemed to follow with blank and bony gaze their progress.

"Guy, let's hurry for I can see the Abbey in the starlight," she exclaimed.

"You have better eyes than mine if you can," he laughed. "My sweet, your face from where I'm sitting is as filmy as a rose at dusk. And even if you can see the Abbey, what does it matter ? Do you think it's going to run down the hill and swim after us ? "

Pauline tried to laugh, but even that grotesque picture of his evoked a new terror, and huddled among the cushions she sat with beating heart, shuddering when the leaves of the great beech-trees fondled her hair. She looked back to her own white fastness and began to wonder if she had left the candle burning there : it seemed to her that she had and that perhaps presently, perhaps even now, somebody was coming to see why it was burning. And still Guy took her farther up the stream. How empty her room would look and what a chill would fall upon the sister or mother that peeped in.

"Oh, take me back," she cried.

But still the canoe cleft the darkness and now, emerging from the cavernous trees, they glided once again into starshine infinitely outspread, through which with the dim glister of a snake the stream coiled and uncoiled itself.

Guy grasped at the reeds and drew the canoe close against the bank, making it fast with two paddles plunged into the mud. Then he gathered her to him so that her head rested upon his shoulder and her lips could meet his. Thus enfolded for a long while she lay content. The candle in her room burned itself out and nothing could disturb her absence, no one could suppose that she was here on this starlit river. Scarcely indeed was she here except as in the midway of deepest sleep, resting between a dream and a dream. She might have stayed unvexed for ever if Guy had not begun to talk, for although at first his voice came softly and pleasantly out of the night and lulled her like a tune heard faintly in some far-off corner of the mind, minute by minute his accents became more real : suddenly,

as her drowsed arm slid over the edge of the canoe into the water, she woke and began herself to talk and, as she talked, to shrink again from the vision of her whole life whether past or present or to come.

In this malicious darkness she wanted to hear more about that girl who had betrayed Michael Fane; she wanted to know things that before she had not even known were hidden. She pressed Guy with questions, and when he would not answer them she began to feel jealous even of unrevealed sin. This girl was the link between all those girls at whose existence in his own past Guy had once hinted. Michael Fane appeared like the tempter and Guy like his easy prey. Distortions of the most ordinary, the most trifling incidents piled themselves upon her imagination; and that visit to London assumed a ghastly and impenetrable mysteriousness.

Guy vainly tried to laugh away her fancies: faster and still faster the evil cohorts swept up against her, almost as tangible as bats flapping into her face.

"Don't talk so loud," said Guy crossly. "Do remember where we are."

Then she reproached him with having brought her here. She felt that he deserved to pay the penalty, and defiantly she was talking louder and louder until Guy with feverish strokes urged the canoe downstream toward home.

"For God's sake, keep quiet," he begged. "What has happened to you?"

That he should be frightened by her violence made her more angry. She threw at him the wildest accusations, how that through him she had ceased to believe in God, to care for her family, for her honour, for him, for life itself.

"Pauline, will you keep quiet. Are you mad to behave like this?"

He drove the canoe into a thorn-bush, so that it should not upset, and he seized her wrist so roughly that she

thought she screamed. There was something splendid in that scream being able to disquiet the night, and in an elation of woe she screamed again.

"Do you know what you're doing?" he demanded.

She found herself asking Guy if she were screaming, and when she knew that at last she could hurt him, she screamed more loudly.

"You used to laugh at me when I said I might go mad," she cried. "Now do you like it? Do you like it?"

"Pauline, I beg you to keep quiet. Pauline, think of your people. Will you promise to keep quiet, if I take you out of this thorn-bush?"

He began to laugh not very mirthfully, and that he could laugh infuriated her so much that she was silent with rage, while Guy disentangled the canoe from the thorn-bush and more swiftly than before urged it toward home.

When they reached the grassy bank that divided the Abbey stream from the mill-pool, she would not get out of the canoe to walk to the other side.

"I cannot cross that pool," she said. "Guy, don't ask me to. I've been afraid of it always. If we cross it to-night, I shall drown myself."

He tried to argue with her. He pleaded with her, he railed at her and finally he laughed at her, until she got out and watched him launch the canoe on the farther side and beckon through the tremulous sheen to her. Wildly she ran down the steep bank and flung herself into the water.

"Where am I? Guy, where am I?"

"Well, at present you're lying on the grass, but where you've been or where I've been this last five minutes. . . . Pauline, are you yourself again?"

"Guy, my dearest, my dearest, I don't know why. . . ." She burst into tears.

"My dearest, how wet you are," she sobbed, stroking his drenched sleeve.

"Well, naturally," he said with a short laugh. "Look here, it was all my fault for bringing you out, so don't get into a state of mind about yourself, but you can't go back in the canoe. My nerves are still too shaky. I can lift you over the wall behind the mill, and we must go back to the Rectory across the street. Come, my Pauline, you're wet, you know. Oh, my own, my sweet, if I could only uncount the hours."

Pauline would never have reached home but for Guy's determination. It was he who guided her past the dark entries, past the crafty windows of Rectory Lane, past the menacing belfry, past the trees of the Rectory drive. By the front door he asked her if she dared go upstairs alone.

"I will wait on the lawn until I see your candle alight," he promised.

She kissed him tragically and crept in. Her room was undisturbed, but in the looking-glass she saw a dripping ghost, and when she held her candle to the window, another ghost vanished slowly into the high grey wall. A cock crowed in the distance, and through the leaves of the wistaria there ran a flutter of waking sparrows.

July

WHEN Guy looked back next morning at what had happened on the river, he felt that the only thing to do was to leave Pauline for a while and give her time and opportunity to recover from the shock. He wondered if it would be wiser merely to write a note to announce his intention or if she had now reached a point at which even a letter would be a disastrous aggravation of her state of mind. He felt that he could not bear any scene that might approximate to that horrible scene last night, and yet to go away abruptly in such circumstances seemed too callous. Supposing that he went across to the Rectory and that Pauline should have another seizure of hatred for him (there was no other word that could express what her attitude had been), how could their engagement possibly go on ? Mrs. Grey would be appalled by the emotional ravages it had made Pauline endure : she would not be justified, whatever Pauline's point of view, in allowing the engagement to last a day longer. It would be surely wiser to write a letter and with all the love he felt explain that he thought she would be happier not to see him for a short while. Yet such a course might provoke her to declare the whole miserable business, and the false deductions that might be made from her account were dreadful to contemplate. He blamed himself entirely for what had happened, and yet he could scarcely have foreseen such a violent change. Even now he could not say what exactly had begun the outburst, and indeed the only explanation of it was by a weight of emotion that had been accumulating for months. Of course he should never

have persuaded her to come out on the river at night, but still that he had done so was only a technical offence against convention. It was she who had magnified her acquiescence beyond any importance he could have conceived. He must thank religion for that, he must thank that poisonous fellow in the confessional who had first started her upon this ruinous path of introspection and self-torment. But, whatever the cause, it was the remedy that demanded his attention, and he twisted the situation round and round without being able to decide how to act. He realized how month by month his sense of responsibility for Pauline had been growing, yet now the problem of her happiness stared at him, brutally insoluble. What was it Margaret had once said about his being unlikely to squander Pauline for a young man's experience? Good God, had not just that been the very thing he had nearly done; and then with a shudder remembering last night, he wondered if he ought any longer to say 'nearly.' He must see her. Of course he must see her this morning. He must somehow heal the injury he had inflicted upon her youth.

Pauline was very gentle when they met. She had no reproaches except for herself and the way she had frightened him.

"Oh, my Pauline, can't you forget it?" he begged. "Let me go away for a month or more. Let me go away till Margaret and Richard are going to be married."

She acquiesced half-listlessly, and then seeming to feel that she might have been cold in her manner, she wished him a happy holiday from her moods and jealousy and exacting love. He tried to pierce the true significance of her attitude, because it held in its heart a premonition for him that everything between them had been destroyed last night, and that henceforth whatever he or she did or said they would meet in the future only as ghosts may meet in shadowy converse and meaningless communion.

"You will be glad to see me when I come back?" he asked.

"Why, my dearest, of course I shall be glad."

He kissed her good-bye, but her kiss was neither the kiss of lover nor of sister, but such a kiss as ghosts may use, seeking to perpetuate the mere form and outward semblance of life lost irrevocably.

When Guy was driving with Godbold along the Shipcot road, he had not made up his mind where he would go, and it was on the spur of the moment, as he stood in the booking-office, that he decided to go and see his father, to whom latterly he had written scarcely at all and of whom he suddenly thought with affection.

"I've settled to give up Plashers Mead," Guy told him that night, when they were sitting in the library at Fox Hall.

"And try and get on the staff of a paper," he added to his father's faint bow. "Or possibly I may go to Persia as Sir George Gascony's secretary. My friend Comeragh got me the offer in March, but Sir George was ill and did not start."

"That sounds much more sensible than journalism," said Mr. Hazlewood.

"Yes, perhaps it would be better," Guy agreed. "But then of course there is the question of leaving Pauline for two years."

Yet even as he enunciated this so solemnly, he knew in his heart that he would be rather glad to postpone for two years all the vexations of love.

His father shrugged his shoulders.

"My poems are coming out this Autumn," Guy volunteered.

His father gave some answer of conventional approbation, and Guy without the least bitterness recognized that to his father the offer of the secretaryship had naturally presented itself as the more important occasion.

"If you want any help with your outfit . . ."

"Oh, you mustn't count on Persia," interrupted Guy. "But I'll go up to town to-morrow and ask Comeragh when Sir George is going."

Next day, however, when Guy was in the train, he began to consider his Persian plan a grave disloyalty to Pauline. He wondered how last night he had come to think of it again and fancied it might have been merely an instinct to gratify his father after their coolness. Of course he would not dream of going really, and yet it would have been jolly. Yes, it would certainly have been jolly, and he was rather relieved to find that Comeragh was out of town for a week, for his presence might have been a temptation. Michael Fane was not in London either, so Guy went round to Maurice Avery's studio in Grosvenor Road and in the pleasure of the company he found there the Persian idea grew less insistent. Maurice himself had just been invited to write a series of articles on the English ballet for a critical weekly journal called The Point of View. They went to a theatre together, and Guy as he listened to Maurice's jargon felt for a while quite rustic and was once or twice definitely taken in by it. Had he really been stagnating all this time at Wychford? And then the old superiority which at Oxford he always felt over his friend reasserted itself.

"You're still skating, Maurice," he drawled. "The superficial area of your brain must be unparalleled."

"You frowsty old yokel!" his friend exclaimed laughing.

"I don't believe I shall get much out of breath, catching up with your advanced ideas," Guy retorted. "Anyway this Autumn I shall come to town for good."

"And about time you did," said Maurice. "I say, mind you send your poems to The Point of View, and I'll give you a smashing fine notice the week after publication."

Guy asked when Michael was coming back.

"He's made a glorious mess of things, hasn't he?" said Maurice.

"Oh, I don't know. Not necessarily."

"Well, I admit he found her out in time. But fancy wanting to marry a girl like that. I told him what she was, and he merely got furious with me. But he's an extraordinary chap altogether. By the way when are *you* going to get married?"

"When I can afford it," said Guy.

"The question is whether an artist can ever afford to get married."

"What rot you talk."

"Wiser men than I have come to that conclusion," said Maurice. "Of course I haven't met your lady-love; but it does seem to me that your present mode of life is bound to be sterile of impressions."

"I don't go about self-consciously obtaining impressions," said Guy a little angrily. "I would as soon search for local colour. Personally I very much doubt if any impressions after eighteen or nineteen help the artist. As it seems to me, all experience after that age is merely valuable for maturing and putting into proportion the more vital experiences of childhood. And I'm not at all sure that there isn't in every artist a capacity for development which proceeds quite independently of externals. I speculate sometimes as to what would be the result upon a really creative temperament of being wrecked at twenty-two on a desert island. I say twenty-two, because I do count as valuable the academic influence that only begins to be effective after eighteen."

"And what is your notion about this literary Crusoe?" asked Maurice.

"Well, I fancy that his work would not suffer at all, that it would ripen, just as certain fruit ripens independently of

sun, that he would display in fact quite normally the characteristic growth of the artist."

"But where would he obtain his reaction?" Maurice asked.

"From himself. If that isn't possible for some people I don't see how you're going to make a distinction between literature and journalism."

"Some journalism is literature."

"Only very bad journalism," Guy argued. "The journalistic mind experiences a quick reaction, the creative writer a very slow one. The journalist is affected by extremes: and he is continually aware of the impression they are making at the moment: contrariwise the creative artist is always unaware of the impression at the moment it is made; he feels it from within first and it develops according to his own characteristics. Let me give you an example. The journalist is like a man who, seeing a mosquito in the act of biting him, claps his hand down and kills it. The creative artist isn't aware of having been bitten until he sees the swelling . . . big or small according to his constitution. It is his business to cure the swelling, not to bother about the insect."

"Your theories may be all right for great creative artists," said Maurice. "And I suppose you're willing to take the risk of stagnation?"

"I'm not a great creative artist," said Guy quickly. "At the same time I'm damned if I'm a journalist. No, the effect of Plashers Mead on me has been to make me long to be a man of action. So far it has been stimulating, and without external help I've been able to reach the conclusion that my poems were never worth writing. . . . I wrote because I wanted to: I don't believe I ever had to."

"Then what are you going to do now?" asked Maurice.

"I'm probably going to work in London at journalism."

"Then, great Scott, why all this preliminary tirade against it?"

"Because I don't want to bluff myself into thinking that I'm going to do anything but be a strictly professional writer," said Guy. "Or else perhaps because I don't really want to come and live in London at all, but go to Persia. Dash it all, for the first time in my life, Maurice, I don't know what I do want, and it's a very humiliating state of affairs for me."

When Guy left the studio that evening, he came away with that pleasant warming of the cockles of the brain that empirical conversation always gave. It was really very pleasant to be chattering away about aesthetic theories, to be meeting new people and to be infused with this sense of being joined up to the motive force of a city's life. At his lodgings in Vincent Square a letter from Pauline awaited his return, and with a shock he realized half way through its perusal that he was reading it listlessly. He turned back and tried to bring to its contents that old feverish absorption in magic pages, but something was wanting whether in the letter or whether in himself he did not know. He came to the point of asking himself if he loved her still as much, and almost with horror at the question vowed he loved her more than ever and that of all things on earth he only longed for their marriage. Yet in bed that night he thought more of his argument in the studio than about Pauline, and when he did think about her it was with a drowsy sense of relief. Vincent Square under the bland city moon seemed very peaceful, and in retrospect Wychford a place of endless storms.

Next morning when Guy sat down to answer Pauline's letter he found himself writing with mechanical fluency without really thinking of her at all. In fact for the moment she represented something that disturbed the Summer calm in London, and he consciously did not want to think

about her until all this late troublous time had lost its actuality and he could be sure of returning to the Pauline of their love's earlier days.

These shuttlecock letters were tossed backward and forward between Wychford and London throughout the rest of June and most of July, and sometimes Guy thought they were as unreal as his own poetry. He spent his time in looking up old friends, in second-hand book shops, in the galleries of theatres. He did not see Michael Fane, who wrote to him from Rome before Guy knew he had gone there. Comeragh however he saw pretty often, and he enjoyed talking about politics nearly as much as about art. He met Sir George Gascony, and Comeragh assured him afterward that when Sir George went out to Persia in August or September he could if he liked go with him. Guy put the notion at the back of his mind whence he occasionally took it out and played with it. In the end, however, when the definite offer came he refused it. This happened at the end of his visit to London when his money was running out and when he had to be going back to Wychford to live somehow on credit, until the Michaelmas quarter replenished his overdrawn account. Before he left town he paid a visit to Mr. Worrall and told him that he wanted his poems to appear anonymously. In fact if it were not for hurting the Rector's feelings he would have stopped their publication altogether.

At the end of a hot and dusty July and about a week before the Lammas wedding of Margaret and Richard, Guy came back to Plashers Mead. The immediate effect of seeing again the place which was now associated in his mind with interminable difficulties was to make him resolute to clarify the situation once and for all, to clarify it so completely that there could never again be a repetition of that night in June. His absence had been in the strictest sense an interlude, and all the letters which marked to each

the existence of the other had been but conventional forms of love and comfortable postponements of reality. When he met Pauline, Guy felt that he met her to all intents directly after that dreadful night, with only this difference that owing to the time they had had for repose he could now say things that six weeks ago he could not have said. He had arrived at Wychford for lunch, and as a matter of course they were to be together that afternoon. Ordinarily on such a piping July day he would have proposed the river for their converse, and it was a sign of how near at hand he felt their last time on the river that he proposed a walk instead.

Guy was aware of wanting to take Pauline to some place that was neither hallowed nor cursed by past hours, and avoiding familiar ways, they reached a barren cup-shaped field shut off from the road by a spinney of firs that offered such a dry and draughty shade as made the field even in the hot sun of afternoon more tolerable. They sat down on the sour stony land among the ragwort and teazles and feverfew. Summer had burnt up this abandoned pasturage, and while they sat in silence Guy rattled from the rank umbels of fools-parsley and hemlock the innumerable seeds that would only profit the rankness of another year.

"Well?" he said at last.

Pauline looked at him questioningly, and he felt impatient to be sitting here on this sour stony land and wondered how for merely this he could have refused that offer of Persian adventure. Not until now had he realized how much he had been resenting the performance of a duty.

"You've hardly told me anything about your time in London," said Pauline.

He looked at her sharply in case this might be a prelude to jealous interrogation.

"There's nothing much to tell. I settled that my poems should appear anonymously. I'm afraid their publication may otherwise do me more harm than good."

" All your poems ? " she asked wistfully.

He nodded impelled by a strong desire for absolute honesty, though he would have liked to except the poems about her, knowing how much she must be wounded to hear even them called worthless.

" Then I've been no good to you at all ? "

" Of course you have. Because these poems are no good, it doesn't follow that what I write next won't be good. And yet I'm uncertain whether I ought to go on merely writing. I'm beginning to wonder if I oughtn't to have gone out to Persia with Gascony. I refused the job because I thought it would upset you. And so, dearest Pauline, when next you feel jealous, do remember that. Do remember that it is always you who come first. Don't think I'm regretful about Persia. I'm only wondering on *your* account if I ought to have gone. It would have made our marriage in three years a certainty, but still I hope by journalism to make it certain in one year. Are you glad, my Pauline ? "

" Yes, of course I'm glad," she answered without fervour.

" And you won't be jealous of my friends ? Because it's impossible to be in London without friends you know."

" I told you I should never be enough."

Guy tried not to be irritated by this.

" If you would only be reasonable ! I realize now that for me at my age it's foolish to withdraw from my contemporaries. I shall stagnate. These two years have not been wasted. . . ."

" Yes, they have," she interrupted, " if your poems are not worth your name."

" Dearest, these two years may well be the foundation on which I build all the rest of my life."

" May they ? "

" Yes, of course. But a desire for the stimulus of other people isn't the only reason for leaving Plashers Mead. I can't afford it here. My debts are really getting impossible

to manage, and unless I can show my father that I'm ready to do anything to be a writer, as I can't go out to Persia, well . . . frankly I don't know what will happen. I gave Burrows notice at Midsummer."

"You never told me," said Pauline.

"Well, no, I was afraid you'd be upset and I wanted you to have this quiet time when I was away. . . ."

"You don't trust me any more," she said.

"Oh, yes, I do, but I thought it would worry you. I know my money affairs do worry you. But now I shall be all right. I'll come down here often, you know, and, oh, really, dearest girl, it is better that I should be in London. So don't be jealous, will you, and don't torment yourself about my debts, will you, and don't think that you are anything but everything to me."

"I expect you'll enjoy being in London," she said slowly shredding the flowers from a spray of wild mignonette.

"I hope I shall be so busy that I won't have time to regret Wychford," said Guy.

He had by now broken off all the rank flowers in reach, and the sour stony ground was littered with seeds and pungent heads of bloom and ragged stalks.

"You'll never regret Wychford," she said. "Never. Because I've spoilt it for you, my darling."

She touched his hand gently and drew close to him, but only timidly; and as she made the movement a flight of goldfinches lighted upon the swaying thistle-down in the hollow of the waste land.

"Pauline! Pauline!" he cried and would have kissed her passionately, but she checked him:

"No, no, I just want to lean my head upon your shoulder for a little while."

Above her murmur he heard the rustle of the goldfinches' song in parting cadences upon the air, rising and falling: and looking down at Pauline in the sunlight, he felt that she was a wounded bird he should be cherishing.

August

THE wedding of Richard and Margaret dreamed of for so long strung Pauline to a pitch of excitement that made her seem never more positively herself. She was conscious as she gazed in the mirror on that Lammas morning that the tired look at the back of her eyes had gone and that in her muslin dress sown with rosebuds she appeared exactly as she ought to have appeared in any prefiguration of herself in bridesmaid's attire. Feeling as she did in a way the principal architect of Richard and Margaret's happiness, she was determined at whatever cost of dejection afterward to bring to the completion of her design all the enthusiasm she had brought to its conception.

"Do you like me as a bridesmaid?" she asked Guy.

And he with obviously eager welcome of the old Pauline could not find enough words to say how much he liked her.

"Richard of course is wearing a tail-coat," she murmured.

"I shan't," he whispered, "when *we* are married. I shall wear tweeds, and you shall wear your white frieze coat . . . the one in which I first saw you. How little you've changed in these two years!"

"Have I? I think I've changed such a lot. Oh, Guy, such a tremendous lot."

He shook his head.

"My rose, if all roses could stay like you, what a world of roses it would be."

The wedding happened as perfectly as Pauline had imagined it would. Margaret looked most beautiful with her slim white satin gown and her weight of dusky hair, while

Richard marched about stiff and awkward, yet so radiant that almost more than anyone it was he who inspired the ceremony with hymeneal triumph and carried it beyond the soilure of unmeaning tears, he and Pauline whose laughter was the expression of the joyous air, since Margaret was too deeply occupied with herself to cast a single questioning look.

In the evening when the diminished family sat in the drawing-room without going upstairs to music as a matter of course, Monica announced abruptly that at the end of the month she was going to be a novice in one of the large Anglican sisterhoods. It seemed as if she had most deliberately taken advantage of the general reaction in order that nobody might have the heart to combat her intention. Pauline and Mrs. Grey gasped, but they had no arguments to bring forward against the idea, and when Monica had outlined the plan in her most precise manner, they simply acquiesced in the decision as immutable.

That night, as Pauline lay awake with the excitement of the wedding still throbbing in her brain, the future from every side began to assail her fancy. It seemed to her since Margaret's marriage and Monica's decision to be a nun that she must be more than ever convinced of her absolute necessity to Guy's existence. Unless she were assured of this she had no right to leave her father and mother. No doubt at least a year would pass before she and Guy could be married, but nevertheless her decision must be made at once. He had not seemed to depend upon her so much when he was in London: his letters had no longer contained those intimate touches that formerly assured her of the intertwining of their lives. But it was not merely a question of letters, this attitude of his that latterly was continually being more sharply defined. Somewhere their love had diverged, and whereas formerly she had always been able to comfort herself with the certainty that between

them love was exactly equal, now instead she could not help fancying that she loved him more than he loved her. It would of course be useless to ask him the question directly, for he would evade an answer by declaring it was prompted by unreasonable jealousy. Yet was her jealousy so very unreasonable, and if it were unreasonable was not that another reason against their marriage ?

Pauline tried to search in the past of their love for the occasion of the divergence. It must be her own fault. It was she who had often behaved foolishly and impetuously, who had always supposed that her mother and sisters knew nothing about love, who had been to Guy all through their engagement utterly useless. It was she who had stopped his becoming a schoolmaster to help his father, it was she who had discouraged him from accepting that post in Persia. As Pauline looked back upon these two years she saw herself at every cross-road in Guy's career standing to persuade him toward the wrong direction.

Then, too, recurred the dreadful problem of religion. It was she who had not resisted his inclination to laugh at what she knew was true. It was she who had most easily and most weakly surrendered, so that it was natural for him to treat her faith as something more conventional than real.

The worries surged round her like waves in the darkness, and the one anchor of hope she still possessed was dragging ominously. Oh, if she could but be sure that she was essential to his happiness, she would be able to conquer everything else. The loneliness of her father and mother, Guy's debts, the religious difficulties, the self-reproach for those moonlit nights upon the river, the jealousy of his friends, the fear of his poems' failure, his absence in London, all these could be overcome if only she were sure of being vital to Guy's felicity.

A dull summer wind sent a stir through the dry leaves of

the creepers, but the night grew hotter notwithstanding and sleep utterly refused to approach her room.

Next day, when Guy came round to the Rectory, Pauline was so eager to hear the answer to her question that she would take no account of the jaded spirit of such a day as this after a wedding, and its natural influence on Guy's point of view.

All the afternoon, however, they helped the Rector with his bulbs, and no opportunity of intimate conversation occurred until after tea when they were sitting in the nursery. The wind that last night had run with slow tremors through the leaves was now blowing gustily, and banks of clouds were gathering, great clouds that made the vegetation seem all the more dry and stale, as they still deferred their drench of rain.

"Guy, I don't want to annoy you, but is it really necessary that your poems should appear without your name?"

"Absolutely," he said firmly.

"You don't think any of them are good?"

"Oh, some are all right, but I don't believe in them as I used to believe in them."

"Sometimes, my dearest, you frighten me with the sudden way in which you dispose of things . . . they were important to you once, weren't they?"

"Of course. But they have outlived their date. I must do better."

She got up and went over to the window-seat, and when she spoke next she was looking at the wicket in the high grey wall.

"Guy, could I outlive my date?"

"Oh, dearest Pauline, I do beg you not to start problems this afternoon. Of course not."

"Are you sure? Are you sure that when you are in London you won't find other girls more interesting than I am?"

" Even if temporarily I were interested in another girl, you may be quite sure that she would always be second to you."

" But you might be interested ? " Pauline asked breathlessly.

" I must be free if I'm going to be an artist."

" Free ? " she echoed slowly.

The cuckoo in the passage struck seven, and Mrs. Grey came into the nursery to invite Guy to stay to dinner. All through the meal Pauline kept saying to herself 'free,' 'free,' 'free,' and afterward when her mother suggested a trio in the music-room, because they could no longer have quartets and because soon they would not even have trios, Pauline played upon her violin nothing but that word 'free,' 'free,' 'free.' In the hall when she kissed Guy good-night, she had an impulse to cling to him and pour out all her woes ; but, remembering how often lately he had been the victim of her overwrought nerves, she let him go without an effort. For a little while she held the door ajar so that a thin shaft of lamplight showed his tall shape walking quickly away under the trees. Why was he walking so quickly away from her ? Oh, it was raining fast, and she shut the door. Upstairs in her room she wrote to him :

Guy, you must forgive me, but I cannot bear the strain of this long engagement any more. I will go away with Miss Verney somewhere to-morrow so that you needn't hurry away from Plashers Mead before you intended. I meant to write you a long letter full of everything, but there isn't any more to say.

Pauline.

Her mother found her sobbing over her desk that was full of childish things, and asked what was the matter.

" I've broken off my engagement," and wearily she told her some of the reasons, but never any reason that might

have seemed to cast the least blame on him. Next morning very early came a note for her mother from Guy in which he said he was leaving Plashers Mead in a couple of hours and begged that she would not let Pauline be the one to go away.

EPIGRAPH

Guy

GUY could not make the effort to fight the doom upon their love declared by Pauline in her letter. He felt that if he did not acquiesce he would go mad: a deadness struck at him that he fancied was a wonderful sense of relief, and hurriedly packing a few things he went in pursuit of his friend Comeragh in case it might not even now be too late to go to Persia. However, though he did not manage to be in time for Sir George Gascony, his friend secured him a job on some committee that was being organized in Macedonia by enthusiastic Liberals. His previous experience there was recommendation enough, and after he had seen his father, acquired his outfit and settled up everything at Plashers Mead by means of Maurice Avery, early in September he set out Eastward.

In Rome Guy picked up Michael Fane who was on the point of starting for the Benedictine monastery at Cava. Having a few days to spare before he went on to Brindisi, he agreed to spend the time with Michael tramping in the sun along the Parthenopean shore.

"I can't understand what consolation you expect to find by shutting yourself up with a lot of frowsty monks," said Guy fretfully.

"Nor can I understand when just at the moment you have been dealt the blow that should at last determine if you are to be an artist," retorted Michael, "I can't understand why you choose that exact moment to go and be futile in Macedonia."

"Do you think I would be an artist now, even if I could?" asked Guy fiercely. "How I hate such a point

of view. No, no, I have made myself miserable and I have made someone else miserable because I thought I wanted to be an artist. But never, never, shall that old jejune ambition be gratified now."

"You'll never try to write anything more?"

"Nothing," said Guy.

"Then what has all this been for?"

"Perhaps to come back in a year, and . . . listen:

O ragged robins, you will bloom each year,
But we shall never pluck you after rain:
For aye, O ragged hearts, you beat alone,
And never more shall you be joined again.

Do you think I want to come back in a year and still be able to versify my grief like that? I look forward to something better than minor poetry."

"You mean you still hope . . ." his friend began.

"I daren't even hope yet . . . but all my life I'll do penance for having said that an artist must be free."

They had reached the inn at Amalfi, where letters might be waiting for them.

Guy read aloud one which had arrived from Maurice Avery.

422 Grosvenor Road,
Westminster.

My dear Guy,

I settled up everything for you at Plashers Mead. Rather a jolly place. I nearly took it on myself. I'm getting quite used to settling up other people's affairs since you and Michael have made me your executor. Good luck to you in Macedonia.

Last night I went to the Orient Ballet and met a perfectly delightful girl. If there is such a thing as love at first sight, I am in love. Jenny Pearl she is called. Forgive this ap-

parently casual enthusiasm, but you two cynics will be able to tear me to pieces to your satisfaction. I offer my heart for your bitter mirth to embalm.

Yours ever

M. A.

Your dog is at Godalming with my people. My sisters talk of nothing else.

"Maurice rises like a phoenix from our ashes," said Guy grimly.

"He was always irrepressible," Michael agreed.

"And still you haven't answered my question about your monkery," Guy persisted.

"You want action. I want contemplation. But don't think that I'm going to take final vows to-morrow."

"And do you really believe in the Christian religion?" Guy asked incredulously.

"Yes, I really do."

"What an extraordinary thing!"

Next day they parted, Michael going to the Benedictine house at Cava, Guy pressing on toward Salerno. With every breath of the rosemary, with every sough of the Aleppo pines, with every murmur of the blue Tyrrhenian winking far below, more and more sharply did he realize that what he had thought at the time was wonderful relief had been more truly despair. Yet in a happier September might he not hope to come back this way, setting his face toward England?

One more turn of the head in the gathering gloom
To watch her figure in the lighted door:
One more wish that I never should turn again,
But watch her standing there for evermore.

Pauline

PAULINE went away with Monica to spend the rest of August and the beginning of September in the depths of the country, where however for all the stillness of the ripe season she did not find very great peace. In every lane, in every wood, below the brow of every hill she was always half-expecting to meet Guy. It was not until Monica was going to her sisterhood and that she came back to see TO LET staring from the windows of Plashers Mead that Pauline was able at last to realize what she had irrevocably done.

On the day after her return Pauline went to see Miss Verney. To her she explained that the engagement was at an end.

" I heard something about it," said Miss Verney. " And feeling sure that it was doubtless on account of money, I must very impertinently beg you to accept this."

Pauline looked at the packet the old maid had thrust into her hand.

" Those are deeds," said Miss Verney importantly. " I have felt for some time past that I do not really need all my money. My income, you know, is very nearly £250 a year. £100 would be ample, and therefore I hope *you* will accept the surplus."

" My darling Miss Verney," said Pauline, " it could not be."

But the old maid was with very great difficulty persuaded of the impossibility.

" And you mean to say," she gasped, " that you are never going to see each other again ? "

"Oh, sometimes," Pauline whispered, "sometimes I wonder if it could really happen that Guy and I should never meet again. Please don't let's talk about it. I shall come and see you often, but you mustn't ever talk about Guy and me, will you?"

"I shall put this money aside," Miss Verney announced, "because I am *most* anxious to prove that £100 a year is ample for me. Extravagance has always been my temptation!"

Later in the afternoon Pauline left her friend and went down Wychford High Street toward home. There were great wine-dark dahlias in the gardens, and the bell was sounding for Evensong. She knelt behind a pillar, all of the congregation. How through this winter that was coming she would love her father and mother. And if Guy ever came back . . . if Guy ever came back. . . .

She heard her father's voice dying away with the close of the Office; and presently they walked about the golden churchyard, arm-in-arm.

"I shouldn't be surprized to see Sternbergia Lutea this year," he observed. "We have had a lot of sun."

"Have we?" Pauline sighed.

"Oh, yes, a great deal of sun."

Her father of course would never speak of that broken engagement, and already she had made her mother promise never to speak of it again. Deep to her inmost heart only these familiar vales and streams and green meadows would speak of it for the rest of her life.

THE END

Capri
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